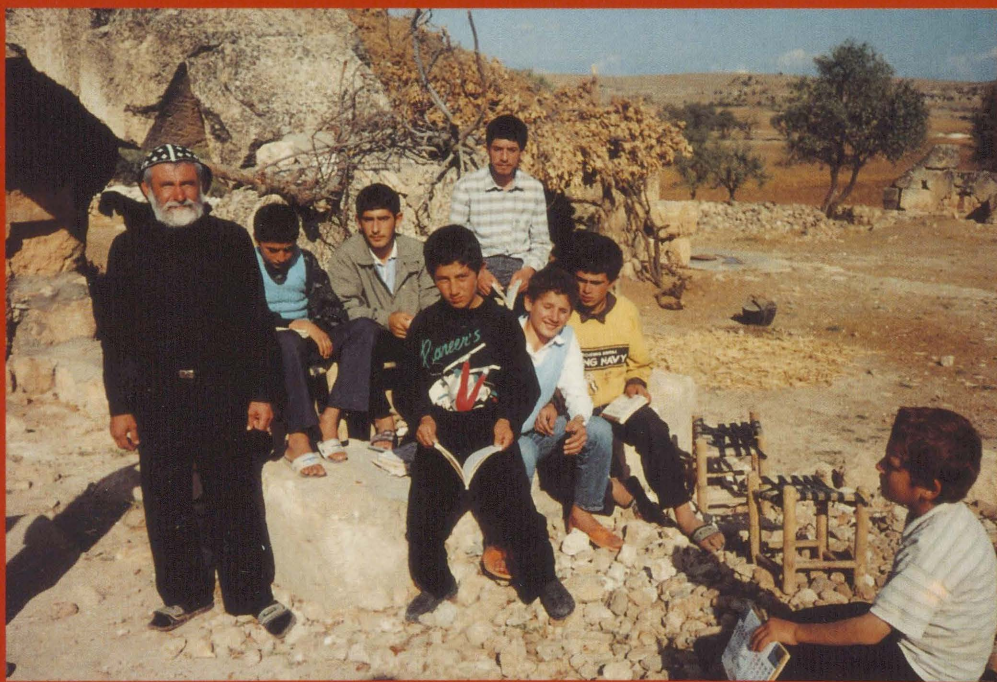


CHRISTINE CHAILLOT

The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ITS LIFE AND SPIRITUALITY



INTER-ORTHODOX DIALOGUE

GENEVA 1998



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Front cover : A monk teaching Syriac to boys (Tur Abdin)

Front inside cover : Syrian Orthodox men in Qaraqosh (Iraq) ; Syrian Orthodox women from south east Turkey living in Holland

Back inside cover : Priest and family in Aleppo; a Syriac lesson: teacher and children in Hasakah (Syria)

Back cover : Deir Zafaran Monastery (Turkey)

Previous books

- C. Chaillot, *Rôle des Images et Vénération des icônes dans les Eglises Orthodoxes Orientales*, Genève, 1993.
- C. Chaillot, *The Malankara Orthodox Church, Visit to the Oriental Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India*, Geneva, 1996.
- *Towards Unity, The Theological Dialogue Between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches* (texts of the Unofficial and Official Dialogue from 1964, and articles), Geneva, 1998.

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This book is dedicated

to all the Syrian Orthodox faithful of the past and of today

who have remained faithful to the Holy Trinity and to the Lord Jesus Christ



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Preface

My Syrian Orthodox Church of the Patriarchate of Antioch belongs to the family of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, as they are called today, consisting of the Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian and Syriac Orthodox traditions. All these Churches follow the christological tradition of Cyril of Alexandria and his formula 'one nature (*physis*) of God the Word incarnate'. In 451, at the Council of Chalcedon, these Churches did not accept the terminology speaking of "two natures" (*physis*) in Christ, which seemed to them to separate the divinity and humanity in Christ.

Nowadays the Syrian Orthodox Church is involved in Theological Dialogue with several Churches. Concerning the theological dialogue between the Oriental Orthodox and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, that is with all the Orthodox who follow the Council of Chalcedon (Greek, Russian, Rumanian, Bulgarian, Serbian, etc), it began, first unofficially, in 1964. The theological discussions revealed that the separation was due to a terminological misunderstanding in the use of the word *physis*, which could be understood as 'nature' or as 'Person'. For both Eastern and Oriental Orthodox families, Christ is fully God and fully Man, in one Person, without confusion, without change, without separation and without division. In consequence the two Orthodox families signed an Agreement concerning the recognition of their common christological faith in St Bishoy Monastery, Egypt, in June 1989. The main official dialogue had begun in 1985 in Chambésy, Geneva, and I represented my Church for that first meeting and the following ones.

Now the anathemas between the two families still have to be removed. Then the question of how and when full communion between the two families can be re-established must be discussed. To concelebrate the Eucharist together would mean that all the differences, theological and others, would no longer be considered as such.

As for the bilateral dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox of Antioch, it took a particular turn when the Synods of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch, both based in Damascus, signed an Agreement in 1991 concerning a common approach to certain pastoral matters.

These documents emphasize that each family must keep its own liturgical and other traditions. In the Middle East this Agreement seems to have been put into practice.

These two Families of Antioch have the same Syriac roots, even if today they both speak Arabic in daily life and often in prayer life, at least in Arabic speaking countries of the Middle East.

In the region of Antioch, at the beginning of Christianity, Greek was spoken mostly in towns on the sea coast, and Syriac in the countryside of Antioch, Jerusalem and Mesopotamia. Arabic was used by some tribes in the desert. Our Syrian Orthodox Church is of Syriac tradition and language which is close to the language spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ.

But at the same time our Syrian Orthodox Fathers and monks knew Greek and even wrote in Greek. After Chalcedon we used to teach Greek in our monasteries: such was the case of Jacob of Edessa in the monastery of Tel'Ade and of Severus Sabokht in the monastery of Qenneshrin. Our Syriac Fathers and monks also translated many texts from Greek into Syriac and contributed to the keeping alive of the Classical and Patristic Greek patrimony. Some even wrote in Greek, like Severus of Antioch and Rabbula of Edessa. In fact, most of our scholars until the 7th century were bi-lingual. In the 13th century our Maphrian Bar Hebraeus translated some of the Chalcedonian canons from Greek and put them in his *Nomocanon*.

We should be attentive to the fact that some Christians around Antioch who were partisans of Chalcedon also continued to use the Syriac language. For instance, even until the present day, a Syriac dialect is spoken in Maalula and other villages near Damascus. Up to at least the 17th century, they had some prayers in Syriac, or mixed firstly with Greek, then with Arabic, as some of their liturgical books and Gospel lectionaries still bear witness.

In order to help the Eastern Orthodox to remember this use of the

Syriac language in the Chalcedonian Eastern Orthodox Church of Antioch and to rediscover the Syriac patrimony and spirituality, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch is going to appoint a lecturer in Syriac in their Theological Seminary of Balamand in Lebanon. The students will then be able to read the sources in Syriac and will also understand better our common Antiochian roots.

We should also remember that, until at least the separation at the Council of Chalcedon (451), Greek and Syriac speaking Christian communities used to pray together in some churches and monasteries around Antioch, Jerusalem and elsewhere in the Middle East.

This type of 'interlinguistic' monastic life provided mutual enrichment and certainly helped the initiative of the great task of translating Greek sources into Syriac.

So, in the Middle East, Syriac and Greek cultures were interlinked for centuries and many reciprocal influences can be found, for instance, on the liturgical level.

Working for unity does not imply that we neglect our Syriac language, history and heritage. On the contrary, we lay stress on that. In new collections, like the Mardin publications in Aleppo, we try to give Arabic translations of our Syrian Orthodox Fathers, as well as the history of the past and of the 20th century.

Through the theological dialogue, we are not going to be intermingled or changed. Everyone will maintain his own Tradition. We shall have to recognise a pluralism in liturgical and other expressions. At the same time, we shall do our best to have the maximum cooperation with the others.

On the ecclesiological level it is also important that people can follow and agree with the decisions of the theologians, and at the same time can be well informed about the Tradition of the others in order to prepare for unity. This latter point is the aim of the present book which is a guideline for those interested in knowing more about the activities of our Church, past and present. The reader will also discover the sufferings and difficulties throughout history which encouraged the faithful of my Church to deepen their faith in Jesus Christ, as well as the richness of the Syriac Antiochian heritage, and the way in which my Church has maintained it.

Our Syrian Orthodox Church also prints and distributes new books in different languages to explain that ecumenical dialogue is an essential part of our modern history. As the official representative at ecumenical

dialogues in the Syrian Orthodox Church, I teach this subject in our Seminary in Ma'arat Sadnaya near Damascus and in other places.

The positive results of the Official Dialogue between the Oriental Orthodox Family and the Eastern Orthodox Family may lead to full communion, hopefully within a few years from now. Our Church is well prepared for this great historical event. Our whole Church, including the diaspora, is ready, even psychologically, to recognise any decision taken by our Synod for full communion with the Eastern Orthodox. The mistakes of past history should not be repeated.

I believe that the two Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Families were one in the past. If today all the factors of division disappeared, both Families should return to their sources. If christology, theology, ecclesiology were sometimes misunderstood in the past, today they are no longer obstacles on the way to reunion.

I hope that this book written with an ecumenical spirit by Christine Chaillot, a Swiss faithful of the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople, will contribute to this dialogue, by giving an introduction to the life and spirituality of our Syrian Orthodox Church of the past and of today, and to realize the true Apostolic succession and development until today of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. It will also very much help our faithful to rediscover their roots and to follow the good examples of their forefathers and to live the true faith with a spiritual mind, wherever they live, as well as to maintain the tradition of their Church and to keep their Syriac patrimony alive.

Metropolitan Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim
of Aleppo

July 1998



Introduction



Who is this venerable worthy old man? He is the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Peter IV (1872-94). Born in Mosul, (today situated in Iraq), he was the first Patriarch of the present age to support the revival of the Syrian Orthodox Church and to be a symbol of the unity of that Church today. He brought the first printing press back from England to the Monastery and Patriarchal Seat of Deir Zafaran, (situated today in south east Turkey), which allowed the publication of books and of a Church magazine. He travelled to India to visit the important group of Indians of Syrian Orthodox faith living there. Twice

he met Queen Victoria in England. She saw in him the embodiment of her idea of Abraham.

The present Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East is His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, the 122nd in the line. His seat is now in Damascus, Syria. The Syrian Orthodox are proud to be the descendants of the Apostolic See of Saint Peter in Antioch.

The Church of the East, so-called "Nestorian", but which prefers to be called "Assyrian" Church, in Arabic "Ashuri", had become autocephalous in 424 and its first Patriarchate was settled in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, south east of Baghdad, in Sasanid Persia. In 431 that Church did not accept the christological definition of the Council of Ephesus and the title of "Mother of God". This tradition is also called "East Syrian". The branch of it which united itself to Rome in 1553 is called "Chaldean".

In 451 other christological disputes arose at the Council of Chalcedon about the formula of one or two "natures" in Christ, on the relation between His humanity and divinity. From 451 until 512 the See of Antioch was occupied alternatively by Chalcedonians defending the Council of Chalcedon, and non-Chalcedonians, with the result of two parallel Patriarchates for the Sees of Antioch and Alexandria.

Today the non-Chalcedonian Churches are officially called "Oriental Orthodox" Churches, and they include the Copts of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Armenians, the Ethiopians, and the Syrian Orthodox of the Patriarchate of Antioch with a great number a faithful in India, as well as an autocephalous Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church also in India.

The Christians who followed the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon and remained thus on the side of the Byzantine emperor were called the Melkites ("imperials"), from the Syriac *malka*, king. They are known today as "Eastern Orthodox", and in Arabic as the "Roum" Orthodox. They are under the Greek or Eastern Orthodox Patriarchates of Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Constantinople which are in communion with the other Eastern Orthodox Patriarchates of Moscow, of Roumania, of Serbia, etc.

The term "Monophysite" was often applied to the Oriental Orthodox Churches, but contemporary theologians and scholars have recognized that it is misleading and must be avoided, as these Churches reject the teaching of Eutyches, whose monophysite views were condemned at the Council of Chalcedon. This is specified in the agreements of the official theological dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches (See *Episkepsis*, especially no 348, 422, 446, 498, 521, Centre Orthodoxe du Patriarcat Oecuménique, 1292 Chambésy, Geneva).

In *History at a glance* the present Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Zakka Iwas I clarifies the christological misunderstanding which created the division after the Council of Chalcedon (451): "The Syrian

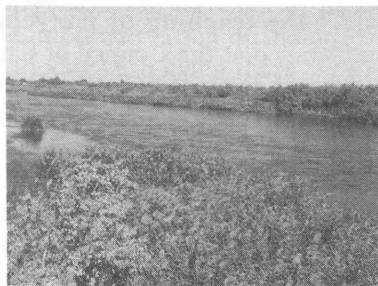
Orthodox Church denies the designation "monophysite" which is Eutychean and which means that the human nature in Jesus Christ was mingled with the divine nature and thus became a mixture and its attributes confused. Eutyches and his teachings were rejected by the Syrian Orthodox Church, which follows the footsteps of Saint Cyril of Alexandria who believed that Jesus Christ was perfectly human and at the same time perfectly divine..."

The official name of the Church and Patriarchate is "Syrian Orthodox of Antioch and All the East". This is why I shall use in this book the name "Syrian Orthodox". Syrian Orthodox belong to the 'West' Syriac tradition. In Arabic they are called "Surian Orthodox".

It is difficult to understand the history of the Syrian Orthodox Church without having firstly made a general historical and geographical survey. When Christianity began to be organised, the Apostolic Sees were settled in Alexandria, Rome and Antioch, which were the cities of the Roman Empire with the most political and strategic importance. They were then organised as the first Patriarchates and recognised as such at the Council of Nicea in 325, being equal in faith and authority. Jerusalem only became Patriarchate in 451. The See of Constantinople was added in 381. In 392 Christianity was declared as official religion in Constantinople, which was the capital of the Byzantine Empire which lasted until 1453.

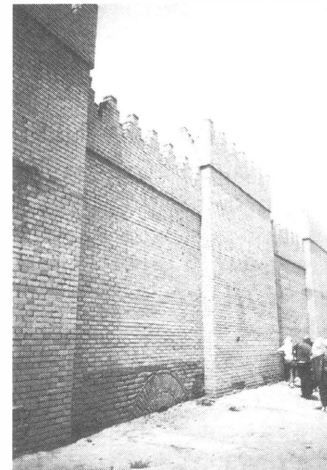
The disciples were called 'Christians' for the first time in Antioch (Acts 11/26). Antioch was at the time of Christ an important "international" centre of commerce, the capital of the Roman province of Syria, multiracial and multilingual, with Arameans, Greeks and Arabs. Antioch was a hellenistic centre. There, and in other coastal cities, Greek was the common language used for administration and culture and also for the liturgy. But the majority of people, especially in the countryside, spoke and prayed in Syriac, a language close to Aramaic which was spoken by Jesus Christ.

The saints Addai, Mari, Aggai and the Apostle Thomas, are said to have brought Christianity firstly to the regions north east of Antioch, of Edessa (Osrhoene) and Nisibis, to upper northern Mesopotamia, that is the plain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. There important religious study centres for the Syriac

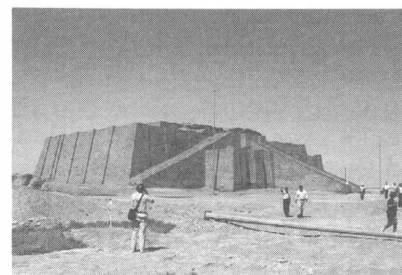


speaking Christians developed. From there Christianity spread to the region around. Some Arabic speaking tribes, like the Ghassanids, became Christians. If we look at a modern map, we see that these places, today in north Syria, Lebanon, south east Turkey and north east Iraq, are the cradle of the Syriac speaking Christians.

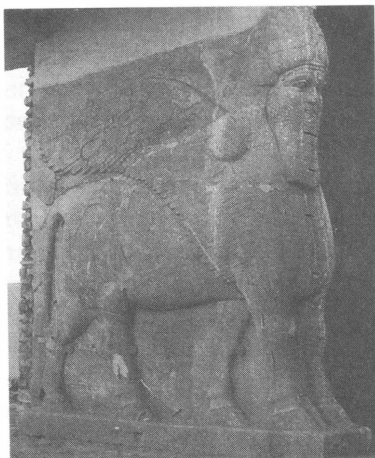
The Syriac speaking people are descended from the Arameans who were Semitic tribes who began to appear in the 11th century B.C. in northern Mesopotamia (Upper Euphrates). From the 10th-8th century B.C. they played an important political role in Syria. The Bible mentions the Arameans in the history of the Patriarchs such as Abraham, whose father came from Ur, and Isaac and Jacob, and also later at the time of the kings David and Solomon, and of others. One will remember Abraham's words (Deuteronomy 26:5): "My father was a wandering Aramean".



Other great civilisations are known in Mesopotamia, such as the Sumerian, Assyrian and Babylonian. The Old Testament refers to several powerful Assyrians, among whom are the kings Sargon II (722-05 B.C.), Assurbanipal (end 7th c. B.C.), and Nebuchadnezzar II (6th c. B.C), and to well-known places such as Nineveh, the last Assyrian capital city in the 7th century B.C. (situated near modern Mosul), and Babylon.



Since the beginning of Christianity the Syrian Orthodox population had to move many times. First of all because Mesopotamia was situated at the eastern border of what was firstly the Roman and later the Byzantine Empire. Both kept fighting with the



Persians, until the coming of the Muslim Arabs in the 7th century. These last considered Christians as *dhimmi* or "protected" people who had to pay important taxes.

As was explained before, until the schism of Chalcedon in 451 the Apostolic Seat of Antioch was common to the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Eastern Orthodox of Antioch. But after that, the Syrian Orthodox had to leave the See of Antioch in 518 and to transfer the headquarters of their Patriarchate to different cities or monasteries in

Syria, around Aleppo, and later in north Mesopotamia. This wandering continued for centuries. Until today political borders often have prevented Syrian Orthodox to have easy communications among themselves.

Between the 3rd and 5th centuries Christianity among the Syriac speaking community spread not only to the whole of Mesopotamia, but also further, to Arabia. Until the middle of the 7th century, the territories of the East Syrian Christians, or Assyrians, and West Syrian, or Syrian Orthodox, were practically divided by the Byzantino-Persian border, but there were also some Syrian Orthodox dioceses in Sasanid Persia. The Sasanids (224-641) were Zoroastrian, or followers of Zarathustra, the founder of the dualistic religion system of the Magi and ancient Persia which survives among the Parsees. After the Arab conquest, this border disappeared and the Syrian Orthodox moved into Persian territory and even further eastwards. Since the first half of the 7th century some Syrian Orthodox colonies were established in distant eastern regions of the Sasanid Empire, as far as Azerbaijan, and in Segestan and in Khorasan, and even, in the second half of the 13th century, as far as Chinese Turkestan (today Sinkiang), and in Ghighintalas, that is north east Turkestan, not far from Mongolia, according to Marco Polo.

From the 7th century, until the 19th century, the so-called Maphrianate of the East was organised for the Syrian Orthodox living mostly on the east side of the Tigris river, former territory of the Persian Sasanids, in the Oriental provinces, (today mainly situated in Iraq).

Some Christians from South India came under the jurisdiction of

the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch.

The north-east corner of Mesopotamia, (today in Turkey), especially in Tur Abdin, became the centre of the Syrian Orthodox when the Patriarchate was settled from 1293 to 1933 in the monastery of Zafaran, near Mardin.

Not recognized as *millet*, or a legally recognized religious community until the end of the 19th century, the Syrian Orthodox had to contact the Ottoman administration through the Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople. In 1923 the Lausanne Treaty spoke of the protection necessary for the religious minorities in Turkey. But several times during the 20th century the freedom of cult, religious teaching, and diffusion of Syriac culture were not allowed.

Though this venerable ancient Church has endured many persecutions throughout the centuries, its people nevertheless always remained witnesses for Christ, and were often martyrs. During World War I about 100,000 Syrian Orthodox, that is about one third of their population, were killed in what is today south-east Turkey. However, those faithful who fled elsewhere in the Middle East, mostly to Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, and to other parts of the world, have since amazingly re-organised their Church which experiences today a new breath of life.

As for the literature of the Syrian Orthodox Church, its heyday was from the 5th to the 13th century. When the Muslim Arabs conquered Sasanid Persia and most of the Oriental provinces of the Byzantine Empire, a new political, religious and cultural order was introduced into western Asia. At the court of the Persians and later of the Caliphs some Syrian Orthodox were given high positions, such as physicians to the rulers.

Through Syriac translations from Greek to Arabic, Greek philosophy and science were transmitted.

Both the Maronite Church, united officially to the Church of Rome in 1215, and the Melkite/Eastern Orthodox Church of Antioch have deep roots in Syriac Christian tradition.

From that illustrious past there are today about 260,000 Syrian Orthodox still living in the Middle East, and around the world, about 150,000 in Europe, the Americas and Australia, and about 1 million living in India. Another million Syrian Orthodox in India form the autocephalous Malankara Orthodox Church.

I now invite the reader to discover this venerable Apostolic Church, so rich in ancient Christian tradition, today one of the Christian minorities in the Middle East, which is unfortunately not very well known by

the other Christian communities. Isolated, it has been suffering and fighting for its survival throughout the centuries. It is time to give it recognition.

As Sebastian Brock, great expert of Syriac studies and lecturer in Oxford, writes: "Syriac spirituality is an authentic representative of the Semitic world out of which the Bible sprung... it has its own particular contribution to make to Christian spirituality as a whole". The spirituality of the Syrian Orthodox must also be discovered through its monastic and liturgical life.

One aim of this little book is to glance at the treasures of the Syrian Orthodox tradition. I cannot pretend to give here a full account of all of them. I beg the reader's pardon for any important omissions or lack of clarity. It was difficult for me to give a fully correct introduction to the different subjects I describe here, as some dates and facts quoted here are still under discussion and may thus be controversial.

The interviews and pictures, made during my trips in the Middle East, mostly in autumn 1996, will, I hope, help the reader to have some direct contact with a few Syrian Orthodox people and places. Some addresses are given at the end of the book for those readers who would like to make further personal contacts.

As in my previous books, I wish through this research to contribute, in a very modest way, to the official theological dialogue between the Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, so that mutual knowledge and understanding can grow. I do not here enter into the theological debate which is the field of specialists (See *Episkepsis*, Chambésy, Geneva since 1964). I rather try, for the purposes of practical ecclesiological dialogue, to help people discover the life and spirituality of the Syrian Orthodox.

The following was kindly explained to me by S.P. Brock. The spelling of geographical names is always a great problem, since the sources themselves will differ, according to whether they are in Greek, Syriac or Arabic; and then on modern maps the transliteration of these will again vary according to the modern language of the map, or its sources = i.e. English, French and German systems of transliterating Syriac and Arabic all differ. So often there are several acceptable spellings. Qenneshre and Qenneshrin (Arabic Qinesrin) = Chalkis, are two different places. Teleda (or Telada), Emesa are the Greek forms of Tel'Ade (Syriac), and Homs (Arabic). Callinicum is the Greek and Latin form of Raqqah (Arabic). Either Beth/Beit is possible, but Beth might be the more familiar in English, due to Bethlehem. Mar Musa is the better

known Arabic form of the Syrian Orthodox Mor Mushe, both being Moses. Melitene and Malatya are the ancient and modern form of the same place. The modern Lebanese names are problematic, since some maps will have the French forms.

The word *Mar* from Syriac Marya, "lord" or "sir", will often be used either in addressing saints or preceding a Patriarch's or Bishop's name. *Mar* is the Classical and modern Eastern Syriac (and Arabic) pronunciation, *Mor* the modern Syrian Orthodox one. When citing modern Syrian Orthodox names, the spelling the Syrian Orthodox themselves use may sometimes be an Arabicized form, rather than the Syriac: e.g. the Patriarch is called 'Mar Ignatius Zakka', not Zakkai. The name James can be found in the Syriac spelling as Ya'qub (academic), or even Jacob used generally by Syriac writers. One can find Gregorius (or -os) for Gregory; Severus/-os and Severios are the same; and Dionysius (or -os) for archaic English Denys. Malfono (or Malphono) is a Syriac title for 'teacher'.

I cannot name here all the people who, in many different ways, have helped me to write this book, by giving me information and advice, and by making corrections. Very special thanks are due to Dr. Sebastian Brock for giving up his very precious time to make most needed and helpful advice, comments and additions. Without him I would have been unable to finish this introduction. His kindness without limit led him in addition to summarize for this book the structure of the main Daily Offices, and to give a glossary of some liturgical terms. He also greatly assisted me in compiling the bibliography. I am especially thankful to Mar Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim, Metropolitan of Aleppo, who helped me in revising the final text and who gave his blessing for the publication of this book.

To the very kind and most helpful nun of the Orthodox Monastery of the Protecting Veil of the Mother of God, Bussy en Othe, France, I feel most obliged for her hard work in making readable the English of the final version of this book.

Part I

Chap. 1 History at a glance

Chap. 2 In Syria

Chap. 3 In Turkey

Chap. 4 In Iraq

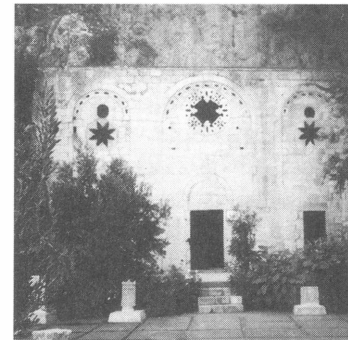
Chap. 5 In Lebanon

Chap. 6 Other Syrian Orthodox around the world

Chapter 1

History at a glance

The writings of the Syrian Orthodox historians and chroniclers about their own Church give us at the same time information and testimonies about general history, from the time of the Persian Sasanid Empire, until the Mongol and Arab invasions and later. The greatest Syrian Orthodox historians are the following: John of Ephesus, who writes about the events of the end of the 6th century (575-85) in his *Ecclesiastical History*; Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor whose *Ecclesiastical History* was written at the end of the 6th century; Jacob of Edessa (d.708) who wrote a *Chronicle*. A lost 9th century *Chronicle* was written by Patriarch Dionysius of Tell-Mahre (d.845). Patriarch Michael I, also



called Michael the Great, is the most famous Syrian Orthodox historian who finished writing his *Chronicle* in 1195. The Maphrian Bar Hebraeus (d.1286) wrote two *Chronicles* (*Secular Chronicle*, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*), which have a special interest in the years 1193-1286; he himself met the Mongol *khan* Hulagu.

Anyone interested not only in Syrian Orthodox Church history, but also in general church history and the history of the Middle East, should read these writings with great attention, in order to understand historical events from a Syrian Orthodox point of view.

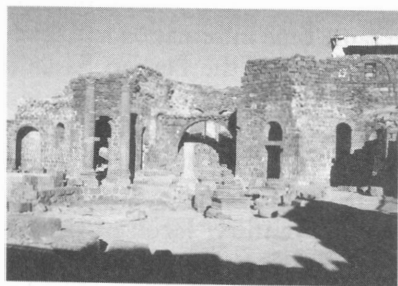


The following lines are a summary and an all too rapid presentation of this tumultuous history.

Saint Peter is considered by the Syrian Orthodox as their first bishop (c.33 to 40 A.D?). After Peter left Antioch with Paul to preach to the world, Evodios took his

place and he is said to have died as martyr under Emperor Nero (54-68 A.D.). He was succeeded by Ignatius, martyred in Rome (ca. 110) under the Emperor Trajan (98-117). Out of respect for him, Ignatius is the name most commonly given to all Syrian Orthodox Patriarchs since 1293.

The See of Antioch had jurisdiction from the Roman province of Arabia (around Bosra, today in Syria near the Jordanian border), to Syria and Roman Mesopotamia (around Amida/Diyarbakir today), as far as Cilicia and Cyprus.



Antioch on the river Orontes, was the capital of the province of Syria and ranked as the third city of the Roman Empire, until the foundation of Constantinople in 330. Already, since the time of Alexander the Great (356-323

B.C.), under the Seleucid dynasty, Antioch was the capital of the region. Today Antioch, now called Antakya, is a little town in south east Turkey at the Syrian border.

The Gospel was quickly spread to Edessa, 260 kilometres east of Antioch, and surroundings where Syriac speaking people were living. The king of Edessa in Osroene, Abgar VIII (179-212) may have become Christian around 200. The name of Edessa is also linked with the king Abgar V Ukomo. According to tradition, while he was sick, he heard of the healing Christ and sent a letter to Him. In answer the *mandylion*, a cloth with the print of the face of Christ, was sent back to him. It is said to have remained in Edessa until 944 when it was brought to Constantinople where it performed many miracles.

Because of successive invasions Edessa eventually lost its fame as a Christian city. Today the place is called Urfa, in Turkey, and since the 1920's there are no Christians left.

During the first three centuries the Church expanded, but also suffered martyrdom in the Roman Empire, until Christianity became the state religion of the Byzantine Empire in the 4th century.

From 224, for over 400 years, the (Zoroastrian) Sasanid dynasty, ruled Persia, with periods of tolerance but also of persecutions against the Christians, especially at times of war with the Roman, and then Byzantine Empires.

In 363 the important Syriac speaking town of Nisibis, on the eastern

frontier of the Roman Empire, was handed over from the Romans to the Persians. Thus, the local Syrian Christians, and among them Saint Ephrem the Syrian, settled further west in Edessa which was already an important centre of the Syriac culture.

The political disputes and wars which occurred between Romans and Persians continued later between the Byzantines and the Persians (325-630). In 532 Emperor Justinian signed a peace treaty with the Persians, but the army of Khosroes occupied Antioch in 540. In 613 the Persians occupied Damascus, pillaged Jerusalem and went as far as Egypt and Anatolia, until 628 when the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius defeated them.

The Church of the East did not accept the decisions of the Council of Ephesus (431). In 451, at the Council of Chalcedon, further misunderstandings created more divisions in the Church. Severus remained as Patriarch in the city of Antioch from 512 to 518, but then he was sent in exile in 518 to Egypt where he died in 538. This created a new separation in the Patriarchate of Antioch between the Chalcedonian "Greek Orthodox" and the non-Chalcedonian "Syrian Orthodox".

After 451 the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch suffered isolation. Mar Jacob Baradaeus (d.578), ordained in 542 as Syrian Orthodox Bishop of Edessa, strengthened the non-Chalcedonian communities by preaching and ordaining clergy. He travelled extensively in Syria, Mesopotamia, Cilicia, Cappadocia, Isauria, and also as far as Arabia and Egypt. His activities are described by John of Ephesus in his Ecclesiastical History. In 559 he raised Ahudemme as the first 'Metropolitan of the East'. This title changed to 'Maphrian' with the election of Marutha (d.649). His headquarters were mostly in Tikrit and Mosul, but sometimes in other places like the Monastery of Saint Mathew called Mar Mattai. The Maphrianate was abolished in 1859 by a Synod decision.

How far did the Syrian Orthodox move eastwards and why? In the first place, around 241-60 deportations of prisoners took place from the Roman to the Sasanid Persian territory. In 609 some Syrian Orthodox were deported from Edessa after the town was taken by the Persians, and in 628 some merchants accompanied Heraclius to Persian territory. In particular at the time of the Arab and Mongol invasions of Persia, many Syrian Orthodox were taken with the invaders. Then there were more Syrian Orthodox in the eastern than in the western provinces. Three bishoprics, then metropoleis, were founded c.640, which had jurisdiction in Herat and Aprah, probably Farah, (both in Afghanistan

today), and in Zarang, (in Iran today). George, bishop of the Arabs (d.724) had his seat in Hirta, south Baghdad.

So, until at least the 11th-12th centuries, the Syrian Orthodox Church extended from Asia Minor to Segestan (today between Iran and Afghanistan), and from Jerusalem and Arabia to Azerbaijan (Maragheh, Tabriz). Tabriz, the capital under the Mongols, is known to have been a Syrian Orthodox bishopric between 1264-1302.

Until at least the 17th century Syrian Orthodox were still found in Shiraz and Isfahan, in Iran.

Great political changes occurred when Arabs occupied Syria in 634-38, Antioch around 636-8, Edessa in 640 and Persia around 640. This brought to an end the Byzantine rule in Syria and the Sasanid/Persian rule in modern Iraq and Iran. The Arab rule permitted the unification of Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia. The Christians had to pay a special tax, the *jizyah*. From 661 to 750 the Umayyads established their capital in Damascus with, firstly, a tolerant political policy towards Christians.

From 750 to 1258, was the golden age of the Abbasids, who established their capital in Baghdad. But some religious discrimination took place at this time and again at the end of 11th century with the arrival of the Seljuks, a Turkish "tribe" who seized Baghdad in 1055, then Jerusalem and Damascus. In 1098 the first Crusaders arrived in Edessa, followed by the Turks in 1144-46.

The 12th and 13th centuries were one of the best periods of prosperity and renewal for the Syrian Orthodox, with outstanding figures such as Dionysius Bar Salibi (d.1171), Michael the Great (d.1199), the Maphrian Bar Hebraeus (d.1286) known as the "encyclopedia" of the 13th century.

The Abbasid Caliphate collapsed with the arrival of the Mongols who firstly favoured the Christians: Hulagu, the grandson of Gengis Khan, who conquered Baghdad in 1258, had a Christian wife. But persecutions followed throughout the 14th century, especially with the advent of Timur Lang: the Syrian Orthodox population was very much weakened and many churches and monasteries were destroyed. Now was the true beginning of a long decline. In the 14th century many cruel deeds were also carried out by the Mamluk Turks (1250-1517).

So, after a first period of peaceful cohabitation with the Arabs, intermittently from the 8th century onwards, periods of persecution followed, with the consequence of conversions to Islam. Until then the Syrian Orthodox were the largest Christian community in Syria and north-west Iraq. From the 14th to 20th centuries Syrian Orthodox

centres would be found mostly in south-east Turkey, in northern Iraq and Syria.

After the Muslim-Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople in 1453, they ruled the people of most of the Middle East, including Syria and Mesopotamia, that is modern Iraq, but not Persia, until after World War I (1914). The Ottomans took Syria in 1516. The Syrian Orthodox people were included in the *millet* attached to the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Armenian *millet* encompassed all the then so-called "monophysites", or Oriental Orthodox subjects of the Sultan. The Armenian and Greek Orthodox Churches, whose Patriarchs were the mediators with the Sublime Porte or Ottoman authority- the Sultan, were the only officially recognised *millets* until the 19th century. Under Patriarch Peter IV (1872-94) the Syrian Orthodox Church was recognised as an independent *millet*.



Another Christian division within the Syrian Orthodox Church began when Andrawos Akhijan (+1677) became the first Syrian Catholic bishop to seek union with the Church of Rome in 1656. But this connection was interrupted until the time of Michael Jarweh who joined the Catholic Church and became the first Syrian Catholic Patriarch in 1783. From that period the Syrian Catholics began activities and many Syrian Orthodox became Catholic, especially in the middle of the 19th century. Patriarch Peter IV (1872-94) tried to control this separation in a peaceful way.



From the 19th century American (1819) and British (1840) Protestant missionaries began to be active in Syria and Iraq.

In the 19th century many Syrian Orthodox faithful were living near the Patriarchate then situated in the monastery of Deir Zafaran, in modern south east Turkey. At the end of the 19th century persecutions by the Kurds and Turks took place in that region. The first important massacres happened in Diyarbakir in 1895, followed

by the genocide (1915-17). These events are well known in the tragic modern history of the Armenians. But what is less known is the fact that the Syrian Orthodox were victims at the same time of the same horrors: one third of them died, that is about 100,000, mostly in Diyarbakir, Kharput, Mardin, Tur Abdin and Urfa, (the ancient Edessa). Some managed to flee to the neighbouring countries of Syria and modern Lebanon, as well as to other places in the Middle East and to the Americas.



In 1919-20 the Peace Conference in Paris took place, and was followed by the Treaty of Sèvres (1920). The Archbishop of Syria, Severos Ephrem, the future Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem I Barsom, was sent as delegate by the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch to represent his community. Mar Ephrem wrote that when people saw him in his ecclesiastical vestments, everybody stared at him. He was given a chance to give a speech in French which he began with the Gospel words "Blessed are the peacemakers", and he

described the poverty, hunger and unfortunate state of his people. But he did not have the impression that people were listening to him and he felt as if he were talking with statues and that it would be nonsense to attend the meeting of the Peace Conference. At a second meeting, he explained about the assassinations of his people. He felt again that he wasted his time as all his speeches were in vain. This is quoted by Bishop Behnam in the *Life of Patriarch Barsom*.

On January 16th 1920 a memorandum, to which an addendum was added on April 2nd, was presented to the Peace Conference in Paris by Mar Ephrem which reported a loss of more than 90,000 innocent Syrian Orthodox people during the massacres, and asked for national and religious freedom.

In 1923 the Republic of Turkey was founded as a secular nation, and in the same year the Lausanne Conference, attended by Mar Ephrem, was concluded on July 24th.

The Lausanne Treaty of 1923 included a statement of the rights of the religious minorities in Turkey (section III articles 37-45), as did the Treaty of Sèvres (part IV, articles 140-51), but no specific mention was made of the Syrian Orthodox community.

Before the massacres, you could find Syrian Orthodox faithful from Kharput in the west to Bitlis in the east, and from Diyarbakir north to Mosul in the south. One can suppose that, because the Syrian Orthodox were too dispersed geographically and because of their small number, they were of no interest for the Western powers who remained indifferent and who did nothing to help them.

So, after the events of the early 20th century the Syrian Orthodox Church was under great trials. When Mar Severos Ephrem became Patriarch (1933-57), he re-organised the life of the Church and of the clergy, while at the same time keeping the tradition and always defending the rights of his community. In 1933, after the move of the Patriarchate from Deir Zafaran to Homs, which was first thought to be temporary, more Syrian Orthodox left for northern Syria, especially for Jazirah and Aleppo.

In 1964 a Maphrianate was reinstated with headquarters in Kerala in India, with a jurisdiction limited to India only. There had been a large Indian community under the jurisdiction of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch since 1665.

In the 1960's and 1970's many Syrian Orthodox from Turkey began to emigrate in order to find work in Europe, at first mostly in Holland and Germany.

At the present time Islamic concerns are stronger in Turkey, and minorities have many and great difficulties to express their linguistic, religious and cultural identity in their daily life, with the result that the emigration of the Syrian Orthodox abroad is more and more important. The difficulties due to the war in Lebanon from 1975 also obliged many Syrian Orthodox to become new exiles. The Syrian Orthodox living in Syria and in Iraq are under lay governments which respect the Syrian Orthodox communities.

As has just been explained, due to innumerable historical harassments, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate has had to move many times since it left Antioch in 518.

At first it was in various monasteries in Syria, around Aleppo; from

c.975 in the Monastery of Mar Barsauma near Malatya, (now in Eastern Turkey); also several times in Amida/Diyarbaker, then mostly again in the Monastery of Mar Barsauma from the 11th to the 13th century (1034-1293).

Patriarch Michael the Great (d.1199) had wanted to settle the See in the monastery of Deir Zafaran, outside Mardin, (today in Turkey), in the 12th century, but that place only became the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate from 1293. The Patriarchate was moved officially to Homs in 1933, and from 1959 it has been situated in Damascus.

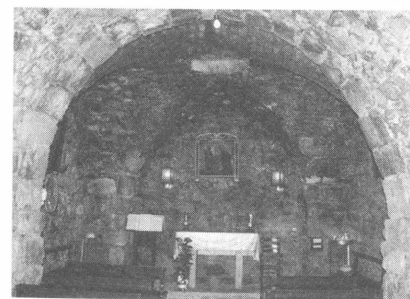
At the Lausanne Conference in 1923, the European powers, namely Great Britain and France, made their repartition of the Middle East and new borders came up in four different modern countries, namely Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. This created separations among the Syrian Orthodox community. At least, under the Ottoman Empire, this had not been the case and easy contacts were then still possible on their ancestral grounds.

In *The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch* at a glance Patriarch Ignatius Zakka writes: "Through all the great storms, the Syrian Orthodox See of Antioch struggled hard to keep the succession of its Patriarchs up to this date".

Chapter 2

In Syria

In 1918-20 the Arab revolution took place in Syria, followed by the French mandate (1920-46) and the birth of the Syrian Arab Republic in 1946. After the 1915 massacre in Turkey the Syrian Orthodox fled, mostly to what is today northern Syria, to Jazirah and to Aleppo. In 1933 Mar Severus Ephrem Barsom, the bishop of Homs from 1918, was elected as Patriarch and it was decided to move, temporarily, the See of the Patriarchate from Deir Zafaran, in Turkey, to Homs in Syria. Then, in 1959, the Patriarchate was moved definitively to Damascus. Under Patriarch Ephrem the dioceses of Jazirah, Aleppo and Damascus were organised. We shall now look at the four Syrian Orthodox bishoprics existing today in Syria. Already in the mid-second century, there were Christians beyond the Euphrates in the northern part of Syria which was part of ancient Mesopotamia. Today there are between 165,000-180,000 Syrian Orthodox in Syria.



1) Damascus

The Patriarchate of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch is the headquarters of all Syrian Orthodox around the world. It is situated in Damascus, the capital of Syria, in the Old City, near the Gate of Saint Thomas (Bab Toma). It is close to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and to the modern church of Saint Ananias, the



place where Saint Paul is said to have been baptised (Acts 9:18). The Syrian Orthodox cathedral is dedicated to Saint George. In the compound and the rooms around there is much coming and going of visitors and Church activities.

The Patriarch consecrates the bishops and the chrism, and he convenes synods. Syrian Orthodox Canon law is based on the *Nomocanon* written by Bar Hebraeus

in the 13th century. The present Constitution of the Syrian Orthodox Church was compiled by the Synod of Homs in 1933 and it was amended by the Synod of Damascus in 1957. A patriarchal magazine is issued in Damascus. The Synod of the bishops is required to meet once every two years.

In each diocese the bishop is helped by the board of clergy and the board of trustees composed of not more than twelve lay men and women. Under the board of trustees there are several committees for different activities (education, charity, health, culture). One committee takes care of the *wagf*, or Church properties, consisting of buildings, lands and factories, bought by the Church to assist the Church budget.

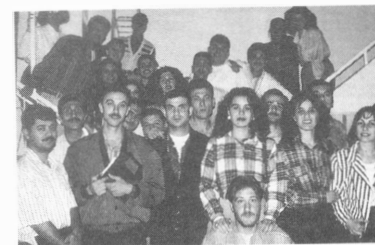
After his election in 1980 Patriarch Zakka inspired and encouraged a spirit of renewal in the Syrian Orthodox Church. First of all it was recommended by the Synod that every parish should have a centre for religious education, including Sunday schools and activities for young people from infancy to university age, and the training of catechism teachers. In the summer the Patriarch organises theological courses for laypeople who are interested.



There is also religious education for families and women. Marcelle Khoury is the coordinator of the women's programme and she organises Bible studies, religious lectures, retreats and charity associations.

The fifteen youth centres of Syria meet once a year on September 14, the feast of the

Cross and the anniversary of the installation of Patriarch Zakka I, to plan activities for the coming year. Father Jean Kawak was one of the priests responsible for the youth: "Sunday school is a sharing of life



between the teacher and the youth. It is not only to listen, but to live together. During the summer we have camps with prayers, trips, spiritual and social lectures and discussions. Our youth also helps and visits poor people and the handicapped. Nowadays it is difficult for the youth to accept blindly what the

Church teaches. But they also find something pure in the atmosphere of the Church and they like it and feel well about it. The liturgy is the best Christian education. The young people sing in the Church choirs".

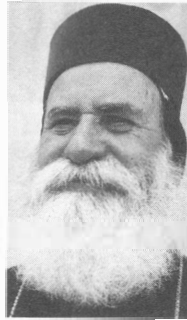
For Nathalie Yousef, Sunday school teacher, French translator and professor, what is important for the children is to understand how to be close to God, that is by the experience of prayer: this helps the children to be in communication with God, and to learn to understand how to lead a Christian life in a spiritual way.

Damascus is not only the seat of the Patriarchate, but also of a diocese. In Saydnaya, near Damascus, there are two churches dedicated to the Virgin and Saint Ephrem, and one under construction dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul. There is the monastery of St Ephrem which has a theological school, with adjacent buildings for conferences, youth meetings and religious education. In 1996 two bishops helped the Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I: one was his vicar for the diocese, Mar Ivanios Boulous Alsouky, the head of the board of trustees who was also responsible for the ecclesiastical court. He resided near the church of the Virgin in Al Kusur, in Damascus. The second bishop was the Patriarch's assistant.



2) Homs

Emesa is the ancient name of Homs. Bishops have been recorded in Homs since the 3rd century. The place became a metropolis in 453. The bishopric was associated with Sadad and the monasteries of Mar Musa and Mar Elia. Homs was under the *sandjaq* of Hama in the *vilayet* of Syria. Mar Meletios Barnaba has been bishop of Homs and Hama since 1957. He came to Homs in 1947 as the secretary of Patriarch Ephrem. His diocese includes more than 40,000 people, 13 priests, 17 churches, in the towns of Homs and Hama and in the villages around. In 1963 he started an orphanage.

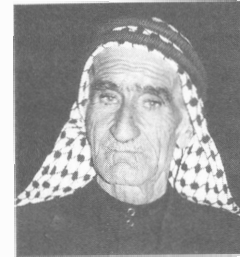


When the cathedral of the Virgin in Homs was restored in 1952, a casket was found under the main altar with a piece of a belt. After analysis it was said to be from Roman times. Believing that it was the Virgin's belt, Patriarch Ephrem made a chapel in the church in 1953 to exhibit it. According to the Syrian Orthodox tradition the belt was given to Saint Thomas by the Virgin Mary after her death.

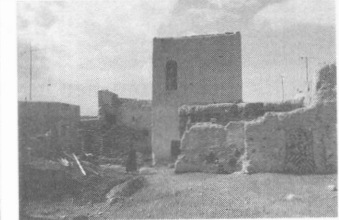
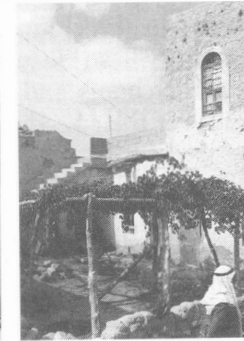
Bishop Barnaba told me: "Our Syrian Orthodox faithful in Homs and Sadad are originally from this area. We follow the faith of the first Apostles which we have kept throughout the



centuries, the difficulties and the persecutions". After having left his village in Turkey, Bishop Barnaba's father, Girgis, became a priest in 1945 in Malkiye, in Jazirah, where he died in 1977. Because of such faithful people the Syrian Orthodox Church has been kept alive through the centuries. In Syrian villages near Homs and in Jazirah, Syrian Orthodox men wear on their head, a white veil, *shmakh*, with a double black band, *'uqal*, which they keep on even inside the church. They take off the band during the liturgies, but not for weddings.



Under the diocese of Homs, in the eastern desert, Sadad and the villages around, such as Zeydel, Fayruzi, F'Hele, Meskane, Hafar, Qaryatain, constitute a very ancient Syrian Orthodox stronghold. Syrian Orthodox have settled in Sadad since early Christian times. The place is mentioned in the Old Testament in Numbers (34:8) and Ezekiel (47:15). Sadad was a place of refuge for

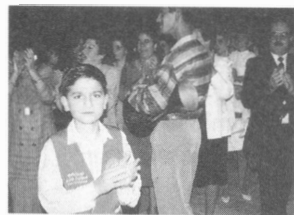


Christians, and the seat of a bishopric apparently since the 11th century. It used to be an important posting-house for the caravans to and from



Palmyra and a commercial centre. Today it is a village which used to be very prosperous before the underground water springs disappeared in the 1960's. Then many inhabitants moved to Homs and Damascus, but they always visit their ancestral homes and land, especially to baptise their children. One lover of Sadad is Mr Habib al Arab, living now in Damascus. He is

known as a Syriac and Church music (*Beth Gazo*) teacher, and he has written a book, *Sadad in History*, published in Damascus in 1995. There he recalls the Syriac traditions and feasts kept jealously in Sadad, like



the weddings which used to last a whole week, with the dance called *dabke* with one man singing in the middle and the others answering around him. Even horse races were then organised for the occasion. Nowadays weddings last only one day. At Christmas they used to make a special fire. After reading this book some young people were inspired and want to continue the traditions of Sadad.

I was present at two weddings in the church of Saint George in Zaidel near Homs. According to the village custom a cortège accompanies the bride from her house to the church and back again. Boys play on little drums and wave swords over their heads, the women and girls sing and dance.

Today in Sadad there are still seven churches; they were more in the past. In the two most famous churches, dedicated to saints Sergius and Bacchus and to saint George, one can admire paintings executed under bishop Sarohan in the 18th century, with some inscriptions in Garshuni and Arabic. They represent the Virgin and Child; Feasts such as the Nativity, Dormition and the Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem; the Last Judgment with the twelve Apostles; and many saints such as saint George, saints Serge and Bacchus, John the Baptist, Moses the Black, Theodoros, Kyriakos, Elijah, Jonah and angels.



One painting shows the Virgin giving her belt to Saint Thomas.

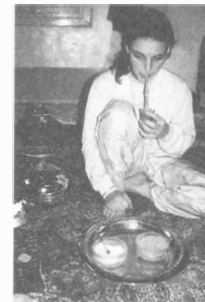
Father Abdullah Antonios Tafas, priest in Hafar near Sadad, teaches Syriac to boys and girls on Saturdays and Sundays.

A teacher, Susan Tafas, showed me her native Sadad with

pride. Her friend prepared *matte* for me, that is a kind of tea made of sour leaves which many people drink there.

That day the people of Sadad wore black and mourned the death of a young man: when the coffin was brought into

the house all the people went in, women waved their handkerchieves over their heads, rubbed their hands and touched the walls of the house with great lamentations.



3) Aleppo

The history of the diocese of Aleppo goes back to the first centuries. We know of a bishop of Aleppo called Osthathios who assisted at the Council of Nicea and became Patriarch of Antioch in 324. The famous

Bar Hebraeus was bishop of Aleppo before he became the Catholicos of the East. Between the 15th and 17th century Syrian Orthodox Patriarchs often visited or even dwelt in Aleppo.

The following personalities were Metropolitans of Aleppo in the 20th century. The most famous one is Mar Barsom who became Patriarch Ephrem, but there were also Clemens Yohannes (1926-8); Athanasios Thoma Qasir (1929-33), and Gregorius Gibrail (1937-43). In 1950 Mar Dionysios Girgis Behnam, a pious monk of Deir Zafaran, was appointed as Archbishop of Aleppo and was known by everyone as a man of God who prayed for the people, advised and helped them. Then in 1979



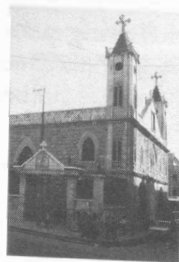
Archbishop Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim became the new Metropolitan. He is a member of the World Council of Churches Central Committee and he is also the representative of his Church in different ecumenical dialogues.

In Aleppo there are two groups of Syrian Orthodox representing two different traditions in language, customs and in liturgy, in different parishes. From 1890 some 425 families, (today around 1200 families), arrived from Urfa and settled in the so-called 'Syrian Quarter', Hai al-Syrian, and they follow the liturgical and pastoral tradition of Urfa. Another 1160 families from Mardin, Diyarbakir, Tur Abdin, and villages around took refuge in Aleppo in the Sulemanyeh quarter where a rich family of Aleppo purchased a piece of land and built the church of Saint Ephrem which was consecrated in 1925 by Patriarch Elias III. It became the cathedral of Aleppo and the seat of the diocese. These buildings were renewed and made larger for the last time in 1995.

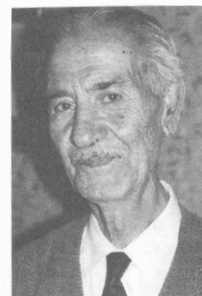
In Aleppo there are two health centres, one hostel for university girls coming from Jazirah and Homs, and one home for old people. Help is organised for handicapped people.

Many activities take place, especially in the two centres for religious education. More than 300 families are members of the Saint George's Association. There is also the only Christian publishing house in Syria under Metropolitan Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim.

Lately the *wagf* has acquired new properties. The diocese of Aleppo numbers about 20,000-25,000 people. Today there are three parishes in Aleppo and three outside Aleppo, in Tabka, Raqqah (the ancient Callinicum), and Latakia.



Mr Yusef Namek is more than 80 years old. He was born in Urfa and left it when he was eight. He remembers his life there and his



Orthodox, famous for its theological school, was completely emptied of all Christians. Edessa and its surroundings are the heart of Syrian Orthodox history. In Aleppo Yusef Namek had a chance to study in the American college where he became the librarian. He wrote books about his Church history and home life, as well as articles and poems. He recognises, like other Syrian Orthodox, that his community left everything behind in Urfa, but that in Aleppo, as many young people could study, so they could achieve a better standard of life.

Farida Boulos' family also came from Urfa where her ancestors were woodcutters. Most of the men of the family were killed in 1915, the rest came to Aleppo with nothing. Today Farida is an English teacher. She lives in the Syrian quarter with her mother and her sister with whom she speaks Armenian, as many Syrian Orthodox from Urfa used to do. She is an active member of the Syrian Orthodox community. From 1967 she worked with other women on the committee of charity for needy families and old people. In 1970 together with other students she started the Sunday

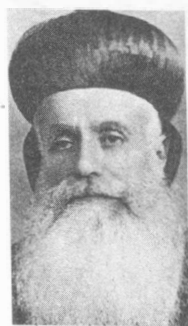




School in the Syrian quarter. She was blessed as a "deaconess", that means that she can sing in the church for morning and evening prayers. She also gives Bible studies. In 1983 they began womens' meetings, and in 1992 a university post graduate group.

4) Archbishopric of Jazirah and Euphrates

In north-east Syria, the area called Jazirah, meaning the "island" in Arabic, crossed by the rivers Euphrates, Tigris and Khabur, is a land fertile in wheat and cotton, where there is now development in oil and natural gas. Around 80,000-100,000 Syrian Orthodox live there, mostly concentrated in Qamishli, at the Turkish border. The diocese extends from Malkiye at the Iraqi/Turkish border to Ras al'Ayn, and south to Dayr az Zawr. It is the largest diocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church, with 30 churches and 17 priests. Al Hasakah is the seat of the bishopric of Jazirah and Euphrates. From 1933 to 1941 Mar Clemens Yohanna Rizq Allah Abadji ruled the diocese, followed in 1943 by Archbishop Osthathios Kyriakos until his death in 1988. The present Metropolitan of al Hasakah is Mar Osthathios Matta Rohom.



This area was under Ottoman administration. Until the end of World War I it was in the *vilayet* of Diyarbaker, (today in Turkey). When most of the Syrian Orthodox tried to flee after the 1915 genocide to Qamishli, Malkiye and al Hasakah, Mar Matta's own grandfa-



ther miraculously escaped after all the people of his village near Midyat, including women, children and old people, were wildly killed in one day and he saw them in a bath of blood.

After 1915 most of the places of Jazirah grew in population with the coming of Syrian Orthodox from Turkey, the majority of whom settled in Qamishli. There has been a centre for the French army since



the 1920's, and it became the "new" Nusaybin on the other side of the new border between Turkey and Syria. Today there are four churches and one under construction, and six priests to serve about 45,000 people. The first church, Mar Ya'qub, built in 1927, was also used as a school at the beginning. Other churches are dedicated to the Virgin Mary, to saint Ephrem and to saint Kyriakos. Outside the town

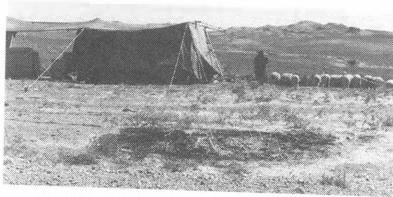


we find the church and centre of Saint George in Tartab and the church of Saint Aho in Damkhiya.

Around Qamishli there are about twenty villages and churches with Syrian Orthodox. Oil wells are exploited. On

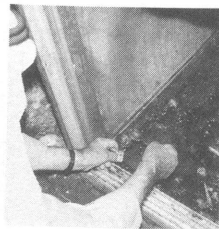


the way from Qamishli to Malkiye one can see many settlements of Bedouins still living under tents. I am told that when the Armenians and Syrian Orthodox fled from the

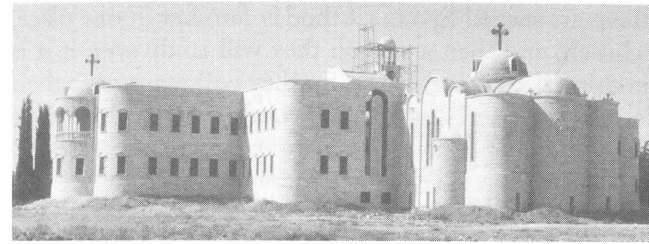


Ottoman Empire in 1915, the Bedouins saved them by giving them food and shelter and they helped them in different ways. They risked their lives doing so. The fact that the two communities continue to have a good relationship was confirmed to me by the *sheikh* or chief of the Bedouins, Abd el Razaq El-Tae of the Tayy tribe, whom I met near Kamishli. He remembers that his people used to be part of the Syrian Orthodox Christian community and speaks of them as his "cousins".

In Malkiye, situated at the north-east tip of Syria, at the Iraqi/Turkish border, myrrh has flowed miraculously from the wall at

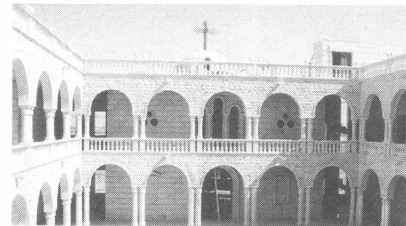


the right of the altar in the church of the Virgin since 1944. Many pilgrims visit the place, especially sterile women. Apparitions of the Virgin have occurred. A community centre can host faithful for weddings, youth meetings, exhibitions.



Twenty five kilometres from al Hasakah a new centre dedicated to the Virgin is being built in

Tell Wardiat, the 'hill of flowers', in the countryside. It is close to Christian Assyrian villages with whom Syrian Orthodox have a good relationship. It will serve the spiritual, social, vocational and educational needs of the community of Jazirah, especially of the youth, and it will



help to revive the education of the faithful, with conferences and summer camps. There will be a large garden and orchard. It will include a library, a shop selling religious items, a vocational centre to teach skills in sewing, embroidery, knitting, and secretarial work, and a hostel. The centre will be

ecumenical and inter-faith and will be open to all visitors. The Archbishop of Jazirah, Mar Matta, told me: "It is significant for our history to say that we are still on our ancestors' land and that we continue our life here". In 1989 in Tell Tuneinir, 20 kilometres southeast of al Hasakah, a ruined mudbrick church was found by

American archeologists (*Biblical Archeologist* 57:1, 1994). It bears architectural features corresponding closely to the churches in the Tur Abdin region and in Mosul and was apparently abandoned at the beginning of the 13th century. On one brick was inscribed the symbol of the cross and only one word left written in Syriac: "hope".



Father Gabriel Qas Matta is priest in the church of Saint Ephrem in Qamishli; his family came from the area of Midyat, as the majority of the families of Jazirah. His father was a priest. Father Gabriel writes Syriac in very beautiful calligraphy and he has copied several Gospels and prayer books. When I asked him about the great responsibility of transmitting the treasury of Syriac spirituality from generation to generation, he

answered that if there are several Syrian Orthodox families in one place, they will build a church, and then a school: they will study even if it is very difficult, as nothing is too hard for them, they will manage as their ancestors did. He tells the youth leaving the country not to lose their souls. He said that some people come back from America to settle in Jazirah in order to educate their children in a more traditional way.

Since 1990 the emigration of Jazirah people to the west has slowed down. But, according to Archbishop Matta, there is a positive side to emigration because those who leave give good financial support to their families in Syria.

There are seven Syrian Orthodox primary schools in Jazirah, one in Qamishli with 1800 children and one with 1000 children in Hasakah. In all Syria there are nine kindergardens and nine primary schools. There all children are taught Syriac and Christian education takes place twice a week.

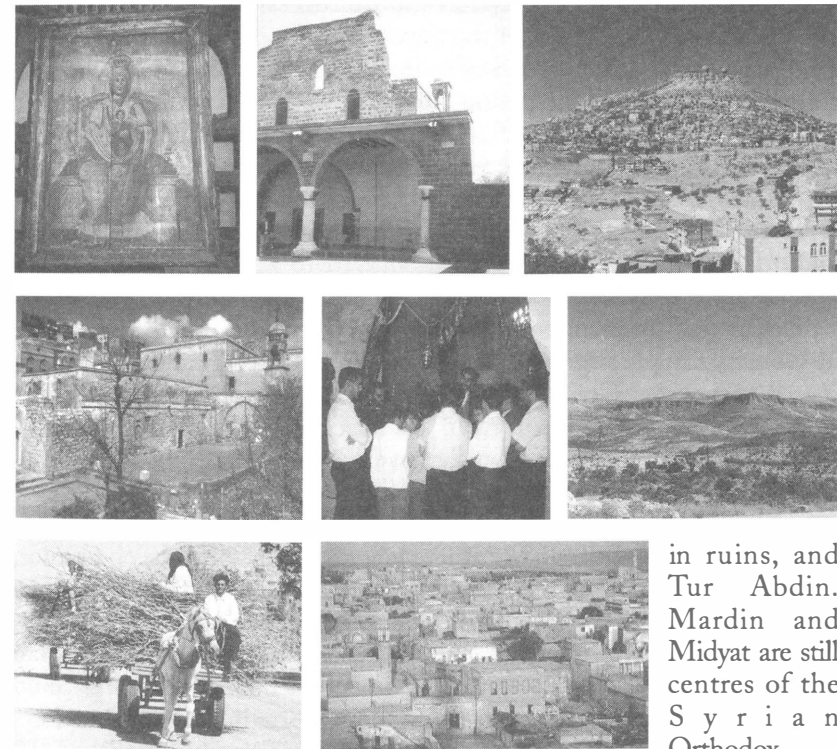
Social help is organised for the poor and for some students.

One cannot leave Jazirah without learning some Syriac words which I often heard when I was there: *bshayno ubashlomo*, welcome, and *en aloho sobe, Insh'Allah*, if God wants.

Chapter 3

In Turkey

The main places of the Syrian Orthodox history are situated in today south east Turkey: Antioch, Nisibis/Nuseybin, Edessa/Urfa, Amida/Diyarbaker, the monastery of Mar Barsauma near Malatya today



in ruins, and Tur Abdin. Mardin and Midyat are still centres of the Syrian Orthodox.

Christianity was spread in the area of Tur Abdin, (today in south east Turkey), apparently by monks, between the middle of the second and the fourth centuries. Mar Jacob (308-38) was the first bishop of Nisibis, today Nuseybin, and the teacher of Saint Ephrem the Great and he is said to have converted many pagans to Christianity.

Tur Abdin could be called the heartland of the Syrian Orthodox,

because a large number of the Syrian Orthodox lived there and around Mardin until the end of the 19th century. Gertrude Bell describes Tur Abdin as a lofty plateau that stretches from Idil and Cizre on the east to Mardin and Diyarbakir on the west, and south to Nisibis. The Tigris river embraces it to north and east, with Syrian and Iraqi borders on the south. This country lies within the confines of the ancient Roman and Persian empires. At that time, while war raged round Amida/Diyarbakir, Marde/Mardin, Dara and Nisibis, the secluded valleys of the Tur Abdin allowed the Christians to live more or less peacefully, in a region of vineyards and fruit trees. Tur Abdin, of which one meaning is 'the Mount of the Servants of God', was a stronghold of the Syrian Orthodox faith and of monasticism. Most of the very ancient churches date back to the period from the 4th to 10th centuries, but they are largely in ruins today. After the 8th century the Abbasids, Seljuks, Mongols and Ottomans succeeded each other. In the Middle Ages more than 70 monasteries were to be found in this area, before the invasion of Tatars in 1232 and of the Mongols with Timur Lang around 1400. In 1293 the Patriarchate was moved to the monastery of Deir Zafaran, near Mardin.

Under the Ottoman empire (from c. 16th), the Armenian Patriarch in Constantinople represented all the non-Chalcedonian Christians, that is except the Greek/Eastern Orthodox. Thus, for centuries, the Syrian Orthodox were included in the Armenian *millet*. After his election by the Church Synod, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch could exercise his functions only after the sultan's recognition by a *firman*, which was obtained through the Armenian Patriarch.

In the middle of the 19th century the patriarchal vicar, Jacob Cyrilos, the future Patriarch Jacob II, bought a piece of land in Tarlabashi, then in Constantinople (now Istanbul), where he built a small church dedicated to the Virgin. Under Patriarch Peter IV (1872-94) the Syrian Orthodox Church was recognised as an independent *millet* and could organise her affairs directly with the Sublime Porte in Constantinople.

Even though liberal policies were put forward in the middle of the 19th century, the first massacre of the Armenians and other Christians took place in 1895-6. Syrian Orthodox were killed, especially in the province or *vilayet* of Diyarbakir and Kharput; one reason was that they spoke Armenian in towns like Diyarbakir, Urfa, Adyaman (south Malatya) and Kharput, where Armenians were the majority. They began to move to Syria, Lebanon (Zahle, Beirut) and to emigrate to the Americas.

In 1908, with the arrival of the Young Turks, equality, justice and democracy were promised to the citizens of the Ottoman Empire. But in 1909 about 1,000 Syrian Orthodox were killed in Adana.

After a printing press had been offered by Queen Victoria, publication began from the end of the 19th century in the monastery of Zafaran. In 1905, in the monastery of Deir Zafaran, a seminary was started, and later a magazine, *Sophia (al Hikma)* (1913-14).

In 1915 the biggest massacres happened, even in areas where there were no Armenians, like Tur Abdin. They continued until 1918.

Some Syrian Orthodox sources relating to this period are notes written by Father Sulaiman Henno and published in Syriac in 1987 in Losser, Holland, and in 1997 in Swedish; as well as *Bloodshed* by Malfono Nu'man Aydin published in Syriac in 1997. The Syrian Catholic Father Isaac Armaleh, who lived in Mardin during the massacres, wrote in detail about this tragedy for the Christians.

In *The Glory of the Syrians, life and bibliography of Mar Ignatios Ephrem*, written by Metropolitan Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, two letters are mentioned (p. 66-9). These letters were written in 1920 by Bishop Mar Ephrem Barsom, then Bishop of Syria residing in Homs, and they are now in the archives of the British Foreign Ministry in London. In one letter, sent to the Prime Minister of Britain David Lloyd George, Mar Ephrem writes of the loss of his people: 345 villages, 156 churches and historic monasteries were destroyed, about 90,313 people were killed of whom 155 were clergy or monks. Six more points were added. He sent another letter to the Chairman of the House of Lords in London.

The Peace Conference in Paris (1919-20) was followed, on August the 10th 1920, by the Treaty of Sèvres which laid down how the Ottoman Empire was to be divided.

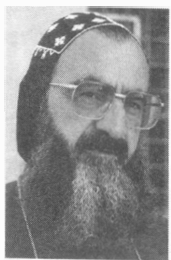
In 1921 the French evacuated Cilicia in south east Turkey. The *sandjak* of Alexandretta, including Antioch, was annexed to Turkey in 1939.

In 1923 the new Turkish Republic was proclaimed. The same year the Peace Treaty was revised at the Lausanne Conference, which also established the borders of modern Turkey. The article 40 (3rd section) of the Lausanne Treaty (1923) speaks of non-Muslim minorities in Turkey, but none is named. A later internal act mentions the Greeks, Armenians and Jews, but not the Syrian Orthodox.

Under President Ataturk (1923) the separation of state and religion was established. New problems arose from 1920 to 1927, including the

killing of some Syrian Orthodox. Again, many Syrian Orthodox fled in small groups, especially in 1922 and 1924, to the nearby Syria (Al Hasakah, Qamishli, Jazirah), to Lebanon, to Jerusalem, and also to Iraq, especially to Mosul and its surroundings. In 1933 it was decided to move the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate from Deir Zafaran to Homs in Syria with the election of Patriarch Barsom. There Church life and institutions were reorganised little by little: the strongest and largest Syrian Orthodox dioceses in the Middle East were then established in Syria.

From the 1960-70's Syrian Orthodox emigrated to Western Europe, mainly to work or for other economic reasons, especially to Germany, the Netherlands, and later to Sweden, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland and France.



Before 1895 the Syrian Orthodox Church had 7 dioceses in Tur Abdin of which only five were left after World War I. The last bishops of Tur Abdin were Mar Yohanna Ephrem Bilgik (d.1981) and Mar Elias Tshankaya (d.1984). In 1997 there was only one Metropolitan left in Tur Abdin, Mar Timotheos Samuel Aktas, residing in the Mar Gabriel Monastery near Midyat, less than 400 families and only 6 priests. In Mardin, near the ancient seat of the Patriarchate, there are still 7 churches, 65 families and one priest left.

A patriarchal vicar, Metropolitan Philoxenos Yusuf Cetin, resides in Istanbul where there is one church belonging to the Syrian Orthodox, in Tarlabashi, dedicated to the Virgin, and other borrowed churches, for about 2,000 families originating from eastern Turkey, and 6 priests. In 1998 there were not more than 10,000 Syrian Orthodox people left in all Turkey.



Daily living conditions are difficult. Villages are abandoned and Syrian Orthodox go to Western Europe and America not only for financial

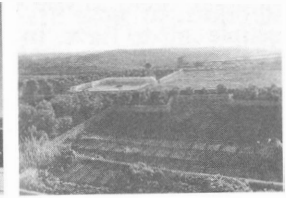
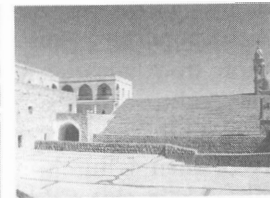
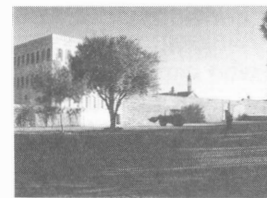
Today the situation of the Syrian Orthodox in Turkey is not encouraging.

reasons, but also for reasons of security. The Kurds who fight for their independence through their PKK, the Kurdish Labour Party, as well as the Hisbollah, a radical Islamic Party, often create a climate of insecurity in the South East of Turkey. Many people ignore or forget that this area is also the mother land of many Syrian Orthodox Christians. The extremely tense situation of the Syrian Orthodox who survive in Turkey is known only by few people and is very rarely mentioned in the press or media. Syrian Orthodox Church authorities have tried to prevent the mass exoduses, without success.

Great activities are seen, however, in Mar Gabriel Monastery, the present residence of the archbishop of Tur Abdin, as well as of several monks and nuns, and of about 30 students who go to the Turkish school and study Syriac and Church tradition in the monastery.

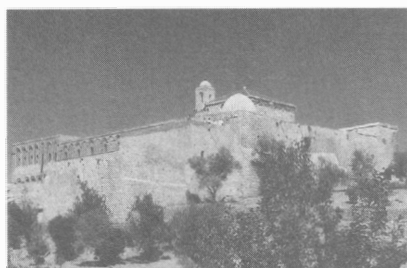


Malfono Isa Gülten, the main Syriac teacher in Mar Gabriel monastery, told me: "We hope that the future will be good for all of us and we wait for that future. We don't give up, we are not hopeless. Through our love and care for our neighbours and for everyone, we hope that God soon will change something in our area to be more peaceful. We hope that it will be easier to live here, to come here as a visitor, to



accept each other as having different religions, to love each other. The monastery tries to be a sign of love: it is open twenty four hours a day to any visitor, following Christian and monastic hospitality. Even Muslims come here for a rest, to receive the blessing from the saints of our monasteries, to ask for prayers.

The same hospitality is offered in the monastery of Zafaran near Mardin. The work we continue to do in the monasteries' buildings and in the fields is the sign that we are attached for all time to our fathers' land here. Our work tries to be an example for our neighbours, who are



Turkish and Kurdish Muslims. We publish, with the Friends of Tur Abdin, an association founded in 1991, in Austria, a magazine, *the Voice of Tur Abdin* which we print to show the importance of Tur Abdin and of its small community, its history, customs, news and activities. It has some articles in English. A solidarity group was founded in 1993. Projects are included for the villages, such as digging wells for irrigation, as our country is dry, and distributing water to the houses. It is important to have such spiritual brotherhood: the friends of Tur Abdin help us as much as they can to maintain Christianity in our mother land, through praying and loving our neighbours. We also wish to show to our people who have emigrated to Europe how to think of Tur Abdin, to invite them to visit their motherland and to help the last remaining people not to leave. In the diaspora our youth is changing: in 1996 we had a good number of visitors from our diaspora who came with their children. They saw the poor conditions of the villages and I spent hours discussing with the youth explaining to them how they should look at the antiquities and history of their Church, as most of the time the parents are not educated enough in this field to be able to tell them. They promised to come back for the next holidays. Back in Europe they described at school what they experienced and what they want to be taught about their tradition and language. They discovered here a spiritual family and rest. To come to Tur Abdin on a pilgrimage to historical places and villages is of more value than reading all the books. In 1997 it will be the 1600 anniversary of the monastery. There will be thousands of our people wanting to visit Tur Abdin. So the feast will be kept all the year round in order to accomodate all of them".

But in 1997 *the Voice of Tur Abdin* reported that the festivities for the anniversary could not take place for security reasons. In March 1996 they had written (no 4): "If, as other Syriac cultural regions, the Tur



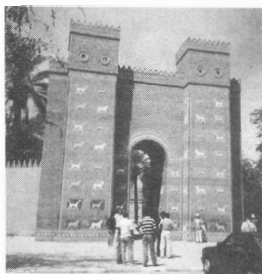
Abdin with its deeply rooted cultural and historical treasures falls into the abyss of forgotten history, it will be a pitiable loss for Christianity in general, but especially for Syriac culture". The future of the Tur Abdin is dependant upon the youth who are urged not to leave the land of their forefathers, but to take charge of their villages, churches, monasteries, faith and culture. A video cassette in German, "Easter in Turabdin" is available, which shows a visit to some monasteries and villages. It can be purchased along with *the Voice of Tur Abdin* by Freunde des Tur Abdin, Bethlehemstrasse 20, 4020 Linz, Austria. *The Voice of Tur Abdin* is present on internet with texts and maps (URL <http://www.uni-passau.de/ktf/turabdin/>).

Malfono Isa concluded: "We hope to continue to exist, especially in the cradle of Syrian Orthodoxy: this is our prayer and our hope. We ask our Christian brothers and sisters to think of us, to pray for us so that Christianity will not disappear in this lonely corner of the world. Here every cross, every relic shows how ancient Christianity is in this land. And it is our belief that Christianity will not end until the second coming of Christ. We live in that hope and we continue to work hard. The most important and specific call in the monastic life in Tur Abdin is to serve humanity and teach humanity how to love. The monks and nuns' lives try to follow this example given by Christ and to share it with any visitor".

And Archbishop Aktas' last words were: "We hope to continue facing difficulties. We do our best to continue our churches in Tur Abdin". He concluded: "Pray for us, pray with us, pray for our neighbours, because we don't have enemies".

In Iraq

Speaking of Syrian Orthodox history, one should not forget the faithful living until now in Iraq, the ancient Mesopotamia, which was evangelised around 100 A.D. In Syriac, Mesopotamia is called Beth nahrin, that is the country between the two rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris, which are mentioned in the Psalms. Here was the cradle of the Babylonian and Assyrian civilisations. Abraham was born in Ur. The tomb of the prophet Jonah is said to be on a hill in ancient Nineveh near modern Mosul.



In 629 the Catholicate or Maphrianate of the East was founded to take care of the Syrian Orthodox living in the dioceses situated in the ancient territory of the Persian Sasanid Empire. It existed until 1859. From 629 the regular title given to the Head of the Church was 'Maphrian', from the Syriac word *afri*, "to make fruitful", or meaning even "Father of fathers". In the mid 13th century the title 'Catholicos' sometimes also came to be used, and it is used today in India, while 'Maphrian' is no longer used. The history of the Catholicate of the East was centred around Tikrit (629-1152), and later mainly in Mosul (1152-1859), but also in Bartalla, Qaraqosh and Mar Mattai and Mar Behnam monasteries, in the northern part of Iraq.

The majority of the Christians of Iraq were traditionally Eastern Syrians, or Assyrians, from the Church of the East. Today they are still in the majority; in second position come the Chaldeans, that is Assyrians who entered the Roman Catholic Church. From the 18th century the Catholic missionaries also converted many Syrian Orthodox who became Syrian Catholic. Today there are about 50,000 Syrian Orthodox in Iraq, more than half of whom live in Baghdad, others in Mosul and the surroundings, and 60 families in Basra.

Evangelisation is said to have begun from Edessa by Addai, one of the 70 disciples. Addai would have been followed by his disciple Mari in 30 A.D. Evangelisation also took place in Ctesiphon, the ancient Persian capital, today south Baghdad.



Many Christian martyrs are known in Persia in the 4th and 5th centuries. Before the Council of Ephesus in 431, the Church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, or Church of the East, declared its autocephaly. Two Syrian Orthodox churches are known in Ctesiphon at the end of the 6th century.

Monks such as Mattai, Zakkai and some disciples propagated the faith. Symeon, bishop of Beth Arsham who died around 532-3, was a very active missionary of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Persia. He wrote the lives of the martyrs of Najran, (today in Saudi Arabia). In 559 Ahudemme, bishop of Beth Arabaye in northern Iraq, also called the apostle of Arab tribes, was ordained as Metropolitan of the East by Mar Jacob Baradeus, with Tikrit as his headquarters. The Syrian Orthodox faith was spread from Tikrit and the monastery of Mar Mattai, in Adiabene and Beth Arabaye. Many monasteries were founded, as well as schools of which the first were in the area of Beth Nuhadra, (north of modern Mosul).

At the beginning of the 7th century the surroundings of ancient Nineveh, were partially populated with Syrian Orthodox. When the Byzantine emperor Heraclius took Nineveh in 627, the Syrian Orthodox were present in all the south of the province of Beth Nuhadra, from the monastery of Mar Behnam as far as Qaraqosh and Bartalla, including the new diocese of Marga, the schools of B.Bani (Baiban) and of B.Qoqi (Baqaq), and the monastery school of Nardos (Deir Gundi), which was to become the seat of the bishop of Beth Nuhadra; as far as the northern monastery of saint Samuel the Mountainer and Mount Sinjar.

The coming of Syrian Orthodox from Roman Syria to Persia began in the earliest history of Christianity. The Acts of Behnam recall people fleeing from Amida to Mosul to escape the persecution of Julian the Apostate (360-3). Deportations also occurred in the following centuries.

Because communications were not easy with the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate situated then in the West of the Euphrates, a Catholicate of the East was organised in Tikrit, which was the seat of the Byzantine governor in Northern Iraq from 627 to 637, to look after the growing number of Syrian Orthodox in the area.

The first to be called Maphrian was Marutha (d.649) born in Beth Nuhadra. He had oversight of 13 bishoprics (Nineveh, Beth Arabaye,

Sinjar, Ma'alta, Arzun, Gomel, Beth Ramman, Karmeh, Gozarta of Qardu, Beth Nuhadra, Peroz Shapur, Shiarzur and the Nomad Arabs Taglibetes), and he created more bishoprics: in Zarang (today in Iran), as well as in Herat and Aprah (today in Afghanistan), and in Azerbaijan. This gives a fair idea of the extent of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Persia in the early seventh century.

In 637, after the Arab conquest, new borders were fixed. It was the end of the Persian Sasanid kingdom. In 759 there was only one Syrian Orthodox bishop for Mosul and Sinjar. Baghdad was founded in A.D. 762.

Tikrit was confirmed as the seat of the Syrian Orthodox in 991 by order of the khalifate.

Throughout the Arab and Mongol invasions of Persia, during which many Syrian Orthodox were again taken by the invaders, there were more Syrian Orthodox in the eastern than in the western provinces. From 935 to 1345 as many as 14 bishoprics were administrated by the Maphrians. But, after 1580, nothing was left of the Syrian Orthodox in Azerbaijan, after the sack of Timur and the black death.

In 1089 Tikrit was destroyed by the Arabs during a revolt against the Persian governor. Consequently the Maphrian John Saliba moved to Mosul. Maphrian Dionysius (1112-34) returned to Tikrit. After another destruction of Tikrit in 1156 by the caliph Al-Muqtafi, the Maphrianate was moved definitively to Mosul. The name of Mosul, which means the junction point, was given by the Arabs.

In 1152 the two Sees of Mosul and Tikrit were united and the Maphrian's title was "Metropolitan of Mosul and Nineveh". In 1153-55 the diocese of Mosul, including Mosul, Tikrit and the monastery of Mar Mattai, was legalised, and it was ordered that Mar Mattai Monastery should be the seat of the Maphrian. Its jurisdiction reached far eastwards to Urmia and Tabriz, (both places being today in north west Iran), and south to Baghdad. Tabriz was the capital under the last Abbasids and Ilkhans and it became the seat of a Syrian Orthodox diocese probably before 1264.

In 1258 the Mongols took Baghdad. The first Mongol khans, or kings, had Christian Assyrian wives. In 1262 Bar Hebraeus speaks of the construction of a Syrian Orthodox church in Arbela/Irbil, the centre of Adiabene and a very ancient city. The 13th century was a golden period for the Syrian Orthodox in Mosul and surroundings, due to the personality of the Catholicos Bar Hebraeus. In 1394 Tikrit was destroyed by Timur Lang. From 1566 to 1777 the famous monastery of Mar Behnam

became the seat of the diocese of Mar Behnam and Qaraqosh. In the 18th century Mosul and the two monasteries of Mar Mattai and Mar Behnam were one diocese, until the separation of 1793. In the 19th century there were apparently two dioceses left: Mosul, and Mar Mattai Monastery having jurisdiction over some villages in the surroundings such as Qaraqosh, Bartalla, Bashqa, Bahzani. In 1839 the monastery with the sanctuary of the martyr Behnam, near Qaraqosh, was taken over by the Syrian Catholics. In 1859, under Mar Basilios Behnam IV, the Catholicate of the East ceased to exist. Until the middle of the 19th century Mosul was under the *pashalik* of Baghdad in the Ottoman Empire and became the capital of a province or *vilayet* only after 1871.

There was an Ottoman presence in Iraq from 1658 until around 1917-18.

Here are some more dates to help the reader to understand the movements of modern history. The British Mandate began in 1920. In 1925 the former Ottoman *vilayet* of Mosul became Iraqi. In 1930 an important Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church took place in Mar Mattai. Independence of Iraq was proclaimed in 1932. In 1958 the monarchy was replaced by a republic. A war took place between Iraq and Iran from 1980-88, followed by the Gulf War in 1990.

Today in Iraq there are three Syrian Orthodox archdioceses: Mar Severus Jamil Hawa takes care of the faithful in Bagdad and Basra; Mar Gregorius Saliba Shamoun of those in Mosul; and Mar Dioscorus Louca Shaya, the abbot of Mar Mattai Monastery, is the bishop of the villages around the monastery. There are more four more Iraqi bishops: Mar Severus Ishak Saka assists in the Patriarchate, and Mar Behnam Jajawi, the former archbishop of Jerusalem, is retired; Mar Philoxenus lives in Atshaneh in Lebanon and Mar Timotheos Aphrem Aboodi in Canada. The last two Patriarchs and the present one are originally from Iraq.



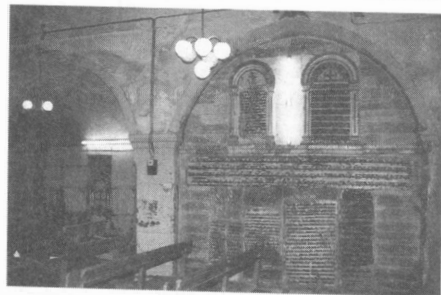
In all Iraq there are over 30 churches and about 30 priests.

In northern Iraq, the Syrian Orthodox are concentrated in Mosul and surroundings.

In five villages near Mosul, Bartalla, Bashqa, Bahzani, Qaraqosh and Merga, there are 7-8 active churches and 10 priests. Here the Syrian Orthodox are especially traditional: in Bartalla and Qaraqosh they continue to speak, Sureth, a Syriac dialect.

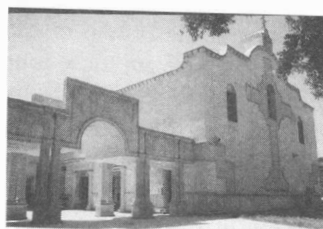
In Mosul there are seven churches.

The most ancient church is dedicated to Saint Thomas the Apostle



who, according to tradition, converted the people here before going to India; some of his relics are kept here. There are tombs of prelates and priests in the church.

There are two churches dedicated to the Virgin. One situated in the

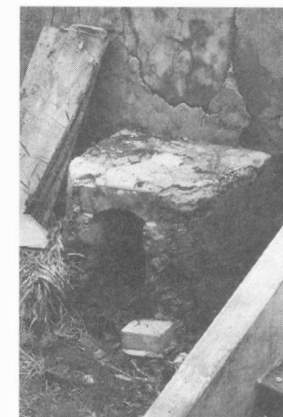


old city, al T a h i r a Aldakhilia, meaning 'the Pure Lady inside the town', also called al Tahira al Q a l ' a , meaning 'of the castle', w a s renewed in 1972.

S a i n t M a r y ' s church or al

Tahira al Kharijia, because the church used to be outside the city, has now become the St Ephrem Seminary. Father Fayez Alshamany is the head of the Seminary. In 1940 many relics of saints were discovered here; these are now kept in the house of the saints (*beth qadishe*) between the church of Saint Mary and the Seminary, just at the entrance to Saint George's church.

The Church of Mar Ahudemme is named after the bishop martyred in 575. It used to be famed for the healings which occurred when people drank water from the well which can still be seen in the courtyard.



The church of Saint Joseph in new Mosul was built in 1959. It was damaged by American bombs in 1990.

In 1988 the church of Saint Ephrem was built: it is the largest in Mosul. Here is the seat of the archdiocese of Mosul, including the house of the bishop, rooms for special visitors, a big hall for meetings

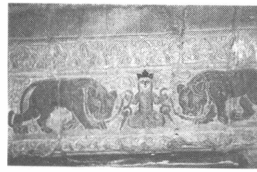
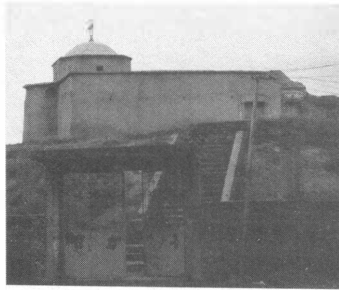


and a library; there is a theological school and a centre for lay people.

The Archdiocese of Mosul includes Qaraqosh, Sinjar, Tamim/Kirkuk. In Sinjar there are 70 families, one church, one priest; in Kirkuk 150 families, one church, one priest. In Irbil and in Sulaymaniyah, situated in Kurdish region, there are a few Syrian Orthodox families, but no priest.

Twenty five kilometres south east of Mosul is the little town of

Qaraqosh which was close to the Monastery of Mar Behnam. Father Fiey says that this ancient Syrian Orthodox place gives an impression of simplicity, solidity and religious fidelity. Qaraqosh means in Turkish 'the black bird'. But the place is still called in Sureth, *Beth Khudaida* or *Ba Khudaida*, 'the home of gods'. In the 11th and 12th centuries Syrian Christians came here from Tikrit. In 1871 some churches were taken by the Catholics. Today there are four Catholic and four Syrian Orthodox churches. Recently there were about 106 Syrian Orthodox families and one priest.



The church dedicated to Bnay Shmuni, that is Saint Shmuni and her seven children, (the equivalent in Greek of Solomon), has an interesting sculpted altar door. Gertrude Bell describes the feminine figure sitting, cross-legged and with hands extended,

between two lions of the lintel. Saint Shmuni and her seven martyred sons, the Maccabees, are very popular saints of the region: they are said to appear on a wall inside the church every year, on their feast day, October 15th. It is said that women who want a child or have another wish throw up their handkerchiefs which stick to the wall if their wishes are granted.



left an inscription recalls the restoration of the church which took place in 1843 thanks to the donation of Mariam the wife of a senior married priest, Yalda. It was last restored in 1982.

The ancient monastery of John of Dailam was built by him and he is buried there. It is said by Bar Hebraeus to have been a nunnery in 1261. The church was restored in 1997.



According to the legend of John of Dailam, the church of Saint Sergius and Bacchus was the first one to be built in Qaraqosh. At the entrance door on the



The ancient church of Saint George is known to have been restored in 1833, but it is now destroyed.

In the 17th century Maphrian Yalda of Qaraqosh went to India where he passed away after thirteen days. His tomb is considered to be a sacred place

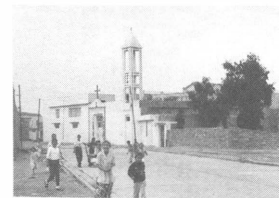
in Kerala by Christians and non-Christians because of the miracles which happen there even until today.

In the time of Father Fiey's expeditions, around Qaraqosh, other ruins of monasteries or churches could be seen.

The Archdiocese of the Monastery of Mar Mattai includes the towns of Bartalla, Bashiqa and Bahzani, with 7 churches in the three places. In Merga there is one church and a few families.

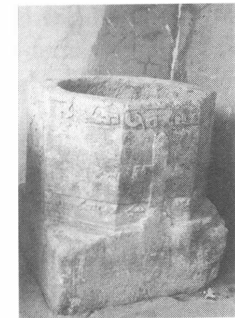
Bartalla is situated about 15 kilometres from Mosul, half way to Mar Mattai Monastery with which it has always had strong links. It is a very ancient Syrian Orthodox site. The History of Marutha speaks of its church school. The famous scholar Mar Severus Ya'qub bar Shakko, bishop of Mar Mattai and Azerbaijan from 1232 to 1241 was from Bartalla, as was Gregorius Yohannan (d. before 1269), bishop of Azerbaijan. The most well-known Maphrian, Gregorius Abu-l Farag, or Bar Hebraeus, (1264-86) lived mostly in Mar Mattai Monastery, but he

also took care of Bartalla. Patriarch Ignatius Yaqub III wrote about the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchs originating from



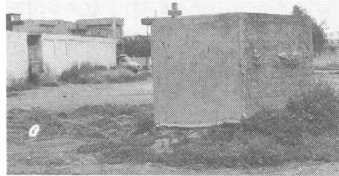
Bartalla, and Patriarch Barsoum gave a list of its famous copyists and medical doctors. Today there are two active Syrian Orthodox churches in Bartalla:

Saint Mary the Virgin, which looks new, but is attested in manuscripts from the 15th century, and Saint Shmuni church, with the relics of Mar



Ahudemmeh and Yohannan bar Naggare. There one can see a baptismal font dated 1343.

In Bartalla there were other ancient churches and monasteries, but today they are invisible; the location of some is however remembered by a simple cross put on a square small building. One is the monastery of the Forty Martyrs. The other is the monastery of Yohannan bar Naggare, John "the son of the carpenters", whose relics were transferred here from Beth Agre by Maphrian Bar Hebraeus. These relics were then transferred to Saint Shmuni church. We know that Bar Hebraeus asked an artist



from Constantinople to decorate the church of that monastery from 1282-5. At that time could be seen representations of: salvation; the chariot of Ezekiel; the prophets; the four evangelists; and, behind the altar, the Virgin surrounded by some Church Fathers.

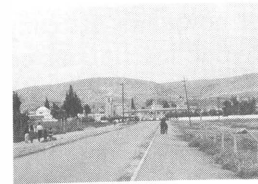
The church of Sepna Sedee, or Sittna Sayida, which may

mean 'our mistress the Lady', was near saint Shmuni church, and close to the church of Mar Ahudemmeh where was the maphrianal cell. On the site of the previous church of Mar Ahudemmeh, it is said that a fiery column used to appear on certain nights in 1939 and the tombs of three bishops were subsequently discovered, and their relics were then transferred to the new church of Saint Shmuni in Bartalla.

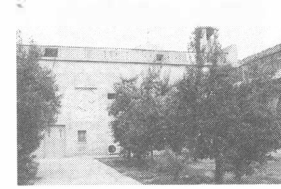
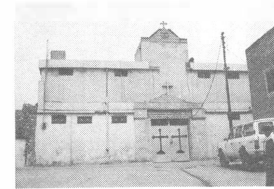
Patriarch Barsom in his *Glance on History of the Syrian nation in Iraq* (1936) and Archbishop Paulos Behnam in his review *Lisan al Mashriq* (January 1948, May 1949) name these churches.



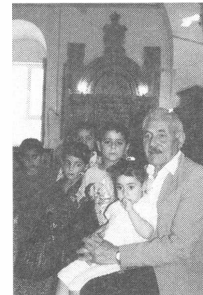
Bashiq is situated 21 kilometres north east of Mosul and 11 north west of Bartalla, with 30 % of the population being Syrian Orthodox (280 families). A famous school was founded here around 630 by Sabroï. Today 65% is Yezidi, a sect worshipping both a good supreme god, and subordinate gods of



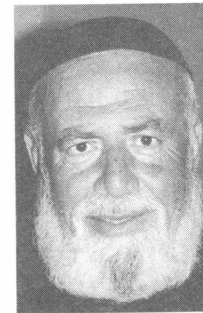
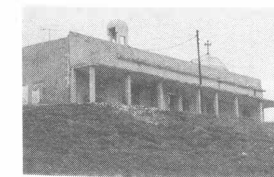
whom the chief is Melek Taus apparently the author of evil. The church of Mart Shmuni was restored in 1890 and again in 1989.



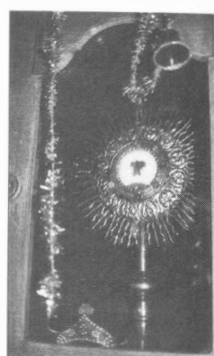
In the village of Bahzani, one and half kilometres from Bashiq, there is also a mixed population of Yezidi and Syrian Orthodox who have one church dedicated to Saint George, rebuilt in 1884, restored in 1949 and again in 1981 and 1997.



At the foot of Mar Mattai monastery the village of Merga is inhabited by Syrian Orthodox. It has one church dedicated to Mar Zakkai. From there pilgrims used to walk up to Mar Mattai Monastery. The nearby village of Magara, whose church was dedicated to the Apostle James, is now completely destroyed.



There are no Syrian Orthodox living in Tikrit nowadays. Recently ancient churches were rediscovered there with Syriac inscriptions on stone.



In Baghdad there are 6 churches. Syrian Orthodox bishops resided in Baghdad from 818 to 1265. In 1934 a new Syrian Orthodox church was built and dedicated to the Virgin. In 1962 the bishopric was re-established and Mar Gregorius Paulos Behnam was elected as Archbishop of Baghdad. He was followed from 1970 to 1980



by Severus Zakka Iwas, the present Patriarch. The cathedral of Saint Peter and Paul was built in 1964. A new church dedicated to Mar Behnam is under construction.



In Basra, in southern Iraq, a church dedicated to the Virgin was built in 1933. From Basra people used to sail to India in ancient times. Father Thoma Sophia was a priest for Basra and Kuwait for 17 years and he is

now serving in the cathedral of Saint Peter and Paul in Baghdad.

In Kuwait the first Syrian Orthodox parish under the Patriarchate of Antioch was established in 1959. About half of the hundred families left Kuwait and Basra after the Gulf War in 1990.

In 1996 there were sixteen students in theology in the seminary in Mosul, among them teachers, engineers, lawyers and a medical doctor; they remain in the seminary for 4 years to be trained as clergy for Iraq. Religious education takes place through Sunday school, and, during the summer holidays, the youth is trained in church to study the Syriac language, history of the Church and theology in different classes, especially in Mosul.



In Baghdad and in Mosul there are active groups of educated young people who help others. In most churches "deaconesses" sing and read. Some old ladies can still be seen wearing the *abaya* or black veil over their clothes when coming to church.

Qaraqosh was a typical Syrian Orthodox village until the coming in the 18th century of the Catholic missionaries who took churches from the Syrian Orthodox. Many Syrian Orthodox, especially among the poor, became



Catholic. The family Goulán (of Qaraqosh), from which comes Archbishop Gregorius Paulos Behnam, has remained faithfully Syrian Orthodox until today. Today the Syrian Orthodox priest serving in Qaraqosh still comes from the same family.



Chapter 5

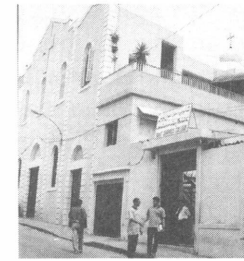
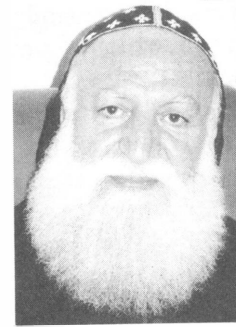
In Lebanon

In 1996 there were about 30,000 Syrian Orthodox living in Lebanon, with 9 churches and 10 priests. The church life is organised as everywhere else: schools, Sunday school, boy scouts, youth movement, ladies associations, primary, secondary and high schools under the Church auspices.

At the beginning of Christianity, modern Lebanon was part of the Roman province of Syria, under the Patriarchate of Antioch; many of its people were of Aramaic origin and spoke Syriac. After the schism of 451 there were Syrian Orthodox living in that area until the end of the 17th century and some villages were completely Syrian Orthodox, such as Hardin in Mount Lebanon. Then, because of Maronite persecutions, some Syrian Orthodox became Maronite and others left. After insurrections in the 19th century in Syria, Aleppo and Damascus, Syrian Orthodox emigrated to Zahlah and Beirut. After the persecution of 1895 in the Eastern part of modern Turkey, especially around Diyarbakir, and after the 1914-18 Ottoman genocide, many Syrian Orthodox fled to Syria. From there some moved on to Lebanon where they founded communities mainly in Zahlah and in Musaytbeh, a district of Beirut. From 1918 a diocese was started for both Syria and Lebanon, with seat in Homs and with Mar Severus Ephrem Barsom as bishop. From 1920 Lebanon came under French Mandate until 1943. In 1921 Syrian Orthodox refugees arrived from Cilicia.

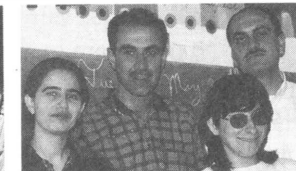
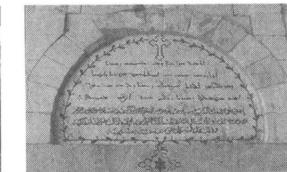
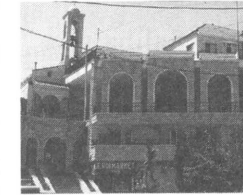
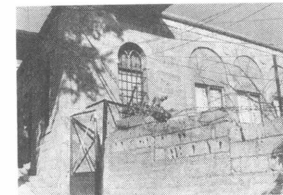
In 1922 Patriarch Elias III visited his faithful in Beirut. When bishop Ephrem Barsom was elected as Patriarch in 1933, the bishopric of Beirut, including Damascus and Zahlah, was given to Mar Yohanna Kandur as bishop, with See in Musaytbeh, where the church of Saints Peter and Paul and also a school were built. In 1950 a new bishop was elected for Lebanon (Beirut, Zahlah, Mount Lebanon and Tripoli) and for the Syrian Orthodox minorities, in those days, in Damascus. His name was Mar Severus Jacob. He was consecrated as Patriarch in 1957 under the name of Ignatius Jacob III, and the Patriarchate was then moved from Homs to Damascus in 1959. Thus in 1959 a new bishop was appointed for Lebanon, Mar Dionysius Behnam Jijawi.

Since 1965 Mar Athanasius Ephrem Barsoum has been responsible



for the bishopric of Lebanon.

The bishop's residence in Beirut is in Musaytbeh, next to the church of Saints Peter and Paul, the offices and the school. There are other churches in this diocese.

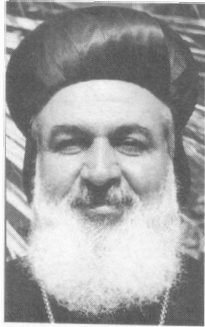


In Ashrafiye the new church dedicated to Saint Ephrem was built in 1993.

From 1980 Zahlah was attached to the bishopric

of Beirut; there it used to be the seat of the seminary, intermittently, from 1939 to 1944. There are two churches, one of which, Saint George, was built in 1925 and a school was added to it in 1934.

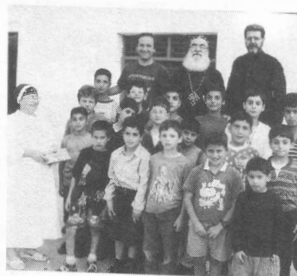
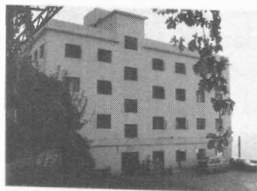
When the number of Syrian Orthodox increased in Lebanon, the bishopric of Mount Lebanon was created in 1973 by Mar Ignatius Jacob III.



In 1981 Father George Saliba was ordained as bishop of the diocese. He is the head of the communications department in the Middle East Council of Churches. In 1983 he built the church of Saint Jacob of Serugh, with episcopal offices in Bushriye, adjacent to Beirut. Today the majority of the Syrian Orthodox Lebanese faithful live in the diocese of Mount Lebanon.

In the mountain in A'ajaltoun, where about 400 families live, there is a project to build the Mar Gabriel Church and Syrian Orthodox centre for activities, especially for the youth.

The orphanage founded in Adana in 1919 was moved to Beirut in



1923, and to Atshaneh on the mountain over Beirut in 1968. Bishop Philoxenus Matta Shamoun now supervises this orphanage for boys, and the home for old people, both being adjacent to the

nunnery of Saint Jacob Baradaeus where spiritual retreats take place.

In Tripoli the church of Saint Ephrem was built in 1958.

In Lebanon the Syrian Orthodox do not have a special deputy sitting in Parliament, but there is one person elected to represent the six following minorities: Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Assyrian, Chaldean, Latin and Copts. The previous deputy, Doctor Asmar Asmar, and the present one elected in October 1996, Jamil Shammass, are Syrian Orthodox.

Before the beginning of the civil war in 1975, there were about 65,000 Syrian Orthodox living in Lebanon. But after 1975, about half of them emigrated to Canada, Australia and mostly to Sweden where the Constitution was open to welcome stateless people. This was particularly the case of the Syrian Orthodox who had had no passport at all since their families left Turkey. During the war the bishops and priests had to help and support the people overcoming very tragic and dangerous situations, like praying for and burying the dead while the bombings were still taking place.

In the 1990's some Syrian Orthodox came back to Lebanon when reconstruction had begun. One of them was Father George Safar who now works in the diocese of Bishop George Saliba. He was born in Beirut. His family was originally from Turkey, near Mydiat, and left in 1939 going firstly to Qamishli, then to Beirut, to work. Later he lived in the USA and in Venezuela. After having been a subdeacon for 30 years, he came back to Beirut to be ordained as a priest and to help re-build his Church community after the war by serving his people. For him Christ was born in this area and his people have to continue following

Christ's teaching here. He told me: "We have to show that we are still alive; if we don't want to lose our ancient Syriac Christian tradition, the clergy has to give the example. Christianity means love, peace and sacrifice. First you must comfort people physically, then you can teach them spiritually. In order to keep the balance between tradition and modern life, people have to study a lot".

In Beirut I had a rewarding spiritual meeting with a surgeon. His name was Melko Dunia. His family came from a Turkish village near Mardin, Kelleth, from which all families migrated to Lebanon after the genocide. As a boy he studied in



the Syrian Orthodox school in Musaytbeh where, he remembers happily that the pupils used to pray three times a day and lived almost as in a monastery. They used to learn the Syriac language and tradition; the lives of the Syriac Fathers and of the heroic martyrs who gave their lives for Christ; to fast; and to hear stories of the monks who prayed all night: all this affected him very much. As an adult he felt he had to be rooted more and more in his Church, serving and preaching.

Following the 1981 Synod decision about religious education for laypeople, groups were organised. Doctor Dunia is responsible for them and for the youth movement throughout Lebanon and he attends meetings in different parishes. There people pray and study the Bible together. Retreats are also organised three or four times a year.

He recognises that one problem is that many of his people no longer understand Syriac, but there is now a group working to provide teaching of this language. In his group people make the effort to understand the liturgy in Syriac and to use some common expressions in everyday speech. But first of all, they try to concentrate on the faith, spirituality and writings of the Fathers. How are they to transfer that spirit to modern life? Doctor Melko answered me: "It is a big challenge. Our four children are not studying in a Syrian Orthodox school as I did. My wife and I try to teach them the Syriac tradition we received and we use some Syriac prayers at home; I also send them to the week's education camp in summer. But it is not enough simply to follow tradition, it must be linked to the love of God. This is the message given by our Church and this is what we are trying to share with the people in our groups. Many writings of our Fathers are liturgical songs in Syriac and we can sing them at any time, even when we are working or driving, and they become part of our life. We have to be rooted in our tradition and at the same time to face the challenges of modern life. When our families came to Lebanon, they had nothing in their pocket. My own grandfather, as he had no money to help pay for the building of our church in Zahlah, offered the work of his hands. Step by step we made our own way in life. Our Church was not supported by anyone. We thank God who kept our Church alive: despite many trials and sufferings we have survived, and we are still witnesses of Christ and of God's mercy. Today some of our people try to find their identity in ancestry or in politics, but not within the context of the Church and its spirituality. In our group meetings we try to encourage our people to be committed to Christ, as His fellow-heirs suffering with Him so that we may be glorified with Him (Rm 8:17). We must learn together how to apply, in the

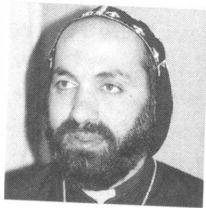
context of modern life, the spirituality of our fathers which is centred on the heart, and to live it in simplicity, with service and love, with the continuous intercessions of all the saints. Anyhow, you cannot do anything without a personal conversion to God". He concluded: "Our Church is deeply rooted, but what is always needed is the power of the Holy Spirit for renewal, and we pray God to send us His Spirit again and again for our renewal (Ps 104:30)".

Archbishop George Saliba thinks that: "in order to keep Christianity where it began, we wish our people to stay in the Middle East. As long as we keep our tradition and faith, we are indebted to our faithful spiritually, socially and even financially, and we are ready to serve and help them. We have to support them with institutions, associations and spiritual meetings".

Other Syrian Orthodox Christians around the world

J.B. Chabot, referring to Michael the Great's *Chronicle*, quotes the estimation that in the 12th century there were about 100 bishops in Syria, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Cyprus, and 18 bishops under the Maphrian. Around 1900 there were, according to Vööbus, 32 Syrian Orthodox dioceses, not counting those in India. Today thirty Syrian Orthodox dioceses are left around the world, of which eleven are in India. We shall now introduce the Syrian Orthodox communities which have not yet been described. The Syrian Orthodox numbers, altogether around the world about 1,4 million, including about 1 million faithful under the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch in India: in the Middle East about 260,000, in Europe about 100,000, more than 35,000 in North America and some thousands of Syrian Orthodox in South America, including Brazilian converts, and in Australia about 3,000. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to have a precise estimate. All the numbers of Syrian Orthodox population, clergy, etc, and other information about the Church found in this book were given to me by Syrian Orthodox authorities.

The Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate in Damascus is responsible for all its faithful around the world. New bishoprics have been organised in Europe and America. In 1997, out of the 30 bishoprics, 12 were in the Middle East, 11 in India, 4 in Europe and 3 in North America. Two bishoprics were vacant, in Argentina and Brazil. There were 33 bishops. As we have seen the Syrian Orthodox people living in the Middle East are settled in Syria (150,000-180,000 people), in Iraq (50,000), in Turkey (10,000), in Lebanon (30,000), as well



as in Jordan (3,000), in Israel (2,500) and in Egypt (30 families). About 50 families live in each of the following places: Kuwait; the Arab Emirates; Saudi Arabia.

In Israel there is a Syrian Orthodox bishop in Jerusalem, residing in the monastery of Saint Mark the church of which, according to tradition, was the house of the Evangelist and where the Last Supper is said to have taken place. There are 100 families in Jerusalem and 400 in Bethlehem. Many Syrian Orthodox pilgrims come from around the world for Easter.

In Jordan, in Amman, Ashrafiye, the church of Saint Ephrem and its centre was built in 1948 for Syrian Orthodox who firstly emigrated from Palestine. Since the Gulf War there are thousands of Iraqi



emigrants passing through Amman. There is a project to build a church dedicated to

the Virgin outside Amman, with a cultural centre, school and a Church court.

In Egypt there is one Syrian Orthodox Church dedicated to the Virgin which is situated in Cairo, not far from the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate. One priest monk takes care of the little community.

Catholicate of India

What about the numerous community in India, whose bishops and faithful are under the jurisdiction of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch? It is a complex history.

After the time of the Apostle Saint Thomas, Christians in India, especially on the south east coast of Kerala, were in close contact with





the Syriac speaking Church of Persia. From 1665, with the arrival of the Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan Mar Gregorios in India, Indian Christians were directly linked to the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of

Antioch. At the beginning of the 20th century, one part of the Indian Church under the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch wished to be an autocephalous Church and it is now called the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India. For the Syrian Orthodox of Antioch the first autocephalous Catholicos, Mar Basilios I Paulos, ordained in 1912 by the deposed Patriarch Abd el Massiah II, was illegal. Disputes began between the two parties, that is the Indian Syrian Orthodox who wished to be under the Patriarchate of Antioch, and the ones who wished to be autocephalous. Misunderstandings continued until 1964. In 1964 the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Mar Ignatius Jacob III, was officially invited by the Holy Synod of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in Kerala, India, to visit the Syrian Orthodox churches and to ordain the first Catholicos recognised by the Syrian Universal Orthodox Church of Antioch. This Catholicos was Mar Basilios Augen I. Due to differences of opinion between the Catholicate in Kerala and the Patriarchate in Damascus, a universal Holy Synod held in Damascus in 1975 decided to consecrate another Catholicos for the churches in Kerala under the jurisdiction of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. Since that date there have been two Catholicos in India, one for the autocephalous Church and one for the patriarchal side whose last Catholicos was Mar Baslios Paulos II (d. 1996).

In 1995 a judgement of the Supreme Court of India affirmed that there is only one Patriarch for the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch in India, one Catholicos, one Constitution and one Church Association. Now both sides, the party under the Patriarchate of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and the autocephalous Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India, will have to make much effort to put this judgement into practice. The Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch is now trying to work for unity and the solution of internal

problems. If both sides come together, it will be very helpful for the future of all Syrian Orthodox Christians.

The Indian Church under the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch is also called the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church. According to the principal of the Seminary Father Addai Jacob, its administration was as follows in 1994. The Seminary, built in 1988, with 30 students and 16 staff members, affiliated to Serampore University near Calcutta, was re-built in 1988 in Vetikel near Mulanthuruthi, 25 kilometres East of Kochi airport. It is the centre of activities of the Church, of the different associations of women, students, youth and clergy. It is also the centre for conferences, for social work, ecumenism and publications. There are about 500 large parishes, with 550 priests. The Church runs 5 hospitals, 10 schools, 3 colleges and 1 engineering college, 3 orphanages.

Nowadays a great number of Syrian Orthodox live in the "diaspora"; in Europe, North America and South America, and from the 1960's in Australia.

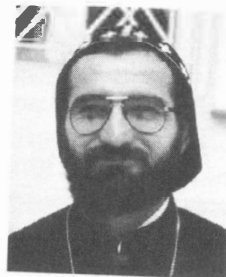
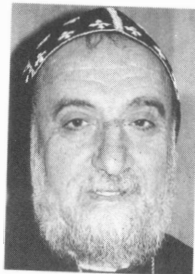
From the end of the 19th century and after the Lausanne Treaty (1923) Syrian Orthodox from the Tur Abdin and from the Middle East began to emigrate, also to North and South America. When Mar Ephrem Barsom was the bishop of Syria and Lebanon in Homs, he visited his people in the diaspora, mainly in North America, and he sent them priests. From the 1960's people from Turkey, including from Tur Abdin, emigrated to Western Europe. From the 1970's, especially because of the war in Lebanon from 1975, another emigration took place from the Middle East. Emigration continues today because of difficulties of life in Turkey, and of other problems in the Middle East.

Europe

The first Syrian Orthodox in Europe were soldiers in the French army, under the Mandate, who settled around Marseilles in 1947 after World War II. Syrian Orthodox students, mostly from Iraq and Syria, also came to Europe. During the 1950's and 1960's, only a very few families emigrated from the Middle East. From 1962 to 1975, families from Tur Abdin, Turkey, came to work in Germany, Holland and other European countries. From then on they came as refugees. From the 1970's, because of the war in Lebanon, many faithful left, mostly for Sweden where the government welcomed many Syrian Orthodox Christians, but also for Holland and Germany. A priest was sent to Augsburg, Germany, in 1971, and another one to Vienna in 1973. There were 6 priests in Europe in 1977.

In 1977 the first church in Europe was consecrated in Hengelo, Holland. The same year two European dioceses were founded, one in Sweden and Scandinavia, and one in Central Europe and the Benelux countries with See in Holland.

In 1981 a monastery, then dedicated to Saint Ephrem, was bought in Losser in Holland. It became the centre of the diocese of Central Europe under Mar Julius Isa Cicek appointed as Metropolitan in 1979.



In 1997 a Bishopric was begun in Germany, with present seat in Warburg Monastery, headed by Bishop Mar Dionysius Isa Gürbüz.

In all the dioceses Church councils are appointed to administer the new parishes.

In 1996 the diocese of Central Europe and the Benelux countries comprised 60 church councils or boards of trustees, with 50 cultural associations; and 40 church buildings, with 55 priests, 5 monks and 5 nuns and more than 50,000 people.

In 1997 there were in Europe about 90 priests (56 West Europe, 32 in Sweden). We shall now describe how the parishes are distributed.



The community living in Germany is very large: from Berlin to Freiburg, and from Augsburg to Hamburg, more than 35,000 people and 40 priests can be found. Twenty churches have been built. One

monastery, dedicated to Saint Jacob of Edessa, was bought in 1995 in Warburg, near Kassel, 200 km from Hengelo. It will probably be also used as a Church centre and hopefully as a little seminary and maybe as a school. Two monks work there.



In Holland we find 8,000 people and 7 priests. The monastery of Saint Ephrem, where 3 monks and 2 nuns



are living in 1998, is also the location of a publishing house for books and a diocesan magazine, *Kolo Suryoyo*, (the Voice of the Syriac). All are printed in different languages, but mostly in Syriac.

In Belgium most of the 800 families live in Brussels where 4 priests serve. Another priest also serves in Liege and Verviers.

In France around 1000 Syrian Orthodox are scattered mainly between Paris, Lyon and Marseilles with one travelling priest. There are five cultural associations. There is a project to build a church in Montfermeil, north of Paris

In Switzerland 4 priests serve the parishes for the 5,000 faithful, most of whom are in the German speaking part, but some in Tessin in the Italian speaking part. In 1996 the monastery of Mar Awgin in Arth near Zurich was bought.

Two monks and one nun live there.

In Austria there are 300 families, most of them living in Vienna, and 1 priest.

Since 1976 the government of Sweden has opened the doors to the Syrian Orthodox refugees. In 1997, there were two bishops, one, Metropolitan Mar Julius Abdullah Shabo, for the diocese established in 1977 and the other, the patriarchal vicar Mar Dioscorus Bünyamin Atash, who came in 1995. Both reside in Södertälje and have jurisdiction over Syrian Orthodox in all Scandinavian countries. There are about 10 churches and 32 priests to take care of more than 40,000 people who come from Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Iraq.

In Norway a priest sometimes visits the 50 Syrian Orthodox families.

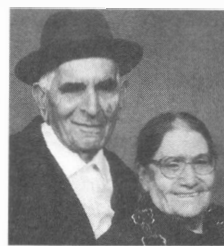
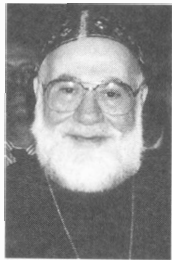
In England there is one priest living in Croydon, near London, who takes care of about 140 families, under the Patriarchate in Damascus.

The 3 monasteries in Europe, in Holland, Germany and

Switzerland, are also spiritual and cultural centres where the Syrian Orthodox diaspora can gather and pray at any time. Meetings and seminars are organised there to help people to preserve their culture and identity. The Syriac language is also taught.

In North America

The presence of Syrian Orthodox in North America dates back to the late 19th century with emigrants from Ottoman Turkey (Diyarbaker, Kharpot, Mardin and Tur Abdin) who first settled in New Jersey,



Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Detroit and in the province of Quebec, Canada. In 1907 Rev. Hanna Koorie was ordained to minister to the faithful in New Jersey. In 1927, the first church was consecrated in West New York, New Jersey. In 1949 Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel (+1995) arrived in the

United States. In 1957 His Eminence was appointed the Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the United States and Canada. In 1958 a cathedral was situated in Hackensack. In 1994 the cathedral was moved to Teaneck, New Jersey. In 1980 an Archdiocesan residence was purchased in Lodi, New Jersey. In 1996 the Archdiocesan offices were moved to Teaneck. Over the years many new parishes have been established throughout the United States and Canada. In 1995 the North American Archdiocese was divided into 3 Patriarchal Vicariates, one for the Eastern United States with 13 parishes, one for the Western United States with 6 parishes, and the third in Canada with 6 parishes. Each vicariate is administered by an archbishop of the Church, with Mar Clemens Eugen Kaplan living in Los Angeles, Mar Cyril Ephrem Karim in New Jersey and Mar Timotheos Ephrem Aboodi in Canada. In addition, a special Malankara Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese has been established for North America with Mar Nicolas Zakarias residing in Nyack,

New York, who takes care of the Syrian Orthodox coming from India. The first church to be obtained on the West Coast was in Los Angeles in 1966. In Canada the first church was consecrated in 1952 in Sherbrooke. In New Jersey a programme of Syriac classes has been established at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck. A number of associations have been created and various liturgical and patristic works have been translated and published in English. Directories including the associations are being printed. An Internet Web Site has been set up under the listing <http://www.SyrianOrthodoxChurch.Org>. Prayers are conducted in several languages, including Syriac, Arabic, Turkish and English. Both regional and North American conventions are held annually as well as youth conventions. The local hierarchy work together to coordinate their various activities. Currently there are 25 parishes carried for by 23 priests. The Syrian Orthodox faithful in North America number more than 35,000 people. In the dioceses there are several newsletters.

South America

The Syrian Orthodox arrived in South America before and during World War I. Parishes have been established in Brazil, in San Paolo, and also in Campo Grande and Belo Horizonte, with 1 priest to serve about 700 Syrian Orthodox families. Moreover, several thousands of Brazilian natives have been converted to Syrian Orthodoxy.

In Argentina the Church has 4 parishes, one in La Plata, a second in Buenos Aires, a third in Frias and the last one in Cordoba. Each has 4 priest monks to serve about 700 families.

In Chile there are about 70 families, no church, and one visiting priest.

Australia

The Syrian Orthodox Church has been present in Australia for the past thirty years. As the then acting bishop of Australia from 1978, the present Patriarch, Mar Zakka I Iwas, helped to open two churches, one in Sydney and one in Melbourne. His Holiness still oversees the present 4 parishes located, one in Sydney, two in Melbourne and one in Perth. At present there are over 600 Syrian Orthodox families in Australia who have come from various parts of the Middle East. They pray in Syriac, Arabic and English.

Conclusion

Many Syrian Orthodox have emigrated to Europe, the Americas and Australia for economic and humanitarian reasons, thus creating a Syrian Orthodox "diaspora". Most of the Syrian Orthodox agree that life

in the diaspora involves risks such as losing their identity, that is their liturgical and patristic tradition, their history and faith, and simply their witness to Christ. Identity and Syriac language are always given as the first essential treasures to safeguard. To do so, some Syrian Orthodox think that it would be better for their people to remain in the Middle East or to return there. Some people come back for holidays. The faithful of the diaspora give generous financial help to the Mother Church by sending money to Turkey and the Middle East.

The Patriarch, bishops and some priests like to visit their people in the diaspora in a regular basis, in order to keep an important link with the Mother Church and to look after the ecclesiastical, liturgical and spiritual life of the exiled faithful. The young bishops appointed in newly created dioceses, with the active collaboration of the faithful, do their best to keep people close to the Church, by organising Sunday schools, by making translations, by teaching at least enough of the liturgical language, Syriac, to enable people to follow and understand the prayers. The Syrian Orthodox clergy living in the diaspora are always trained in Syriac. With both pastoral and catechetical intentions, Bishop Athanasios Samuel of Lodi printed the main Syrian Orthodox anaphoras and services in English. In India they had already translated the prayers into the spoken language, Malayalam, by 1811. In the diaspora the local languages (German, Dutch, Swedish, English, Spanish and Portuguese) are used increasingly for the prayers, as well as Arabic and even Turkish. Syriac is kept for the important parts of the liturgy. All these actions, and others, help to keep the ancient tradition alive in the diaspora as much as possible, at different levels.

A young girl who had emigrated to Germany, wrote in *the Voice of Tur Abdin* in 1996: "Here we live a good life with everything material, and in a democracy. But we must also think of our souls, which we too often forget because of the clinking of money and of hatred of heart. I see those people who live in a poor way, but always with love for God and thinking about Him, as the most important creatures in the world".

In 1965 a Syrian Orthodox asked the Bishop of Mardin Dolapönü: "Is it the end of the Syrian Orthodox Church if, in fleeing from Turkey, the faithful will probably lose their identity and traditional faith?". The bishop answered: "The end of our Church will not come, my son. If the sun of the Syrian Orthodox goes down in Turkey, it will come up again somewhere else in the world. The healthy root was, and will always be, there, even if the tree was cut drastically, again and again, it will continue to blossom, because of its undamaged root".

Part II

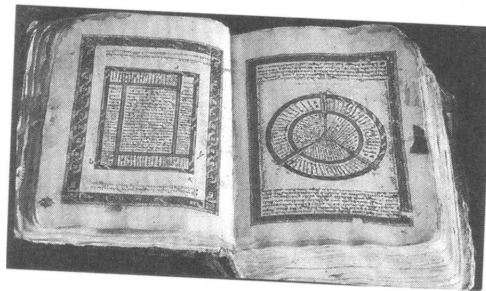
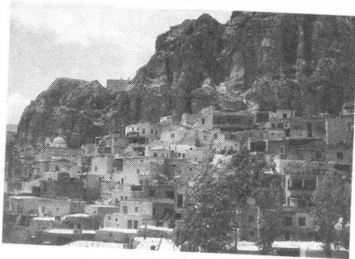
- Chap. 7 Syriac language and studies*
- Chap. 8 Liturgical Life*
- Chap. 9 Monastic tradition*
- Chap. 10 Syriac Spirituality*
- Chap. 11 Contemporary Spiritual Figures*

Syriac language, literature and studies

The Arameans were the people who had settled since the 12/11th c. B.C. in Mesopotamia and Syria. Their language was Aramaic, an ancient Semitic language widely used in the Middle East and related to Hebrew and Arabic. Palestinian Aramaic was the language spoken by Jesus Christ.

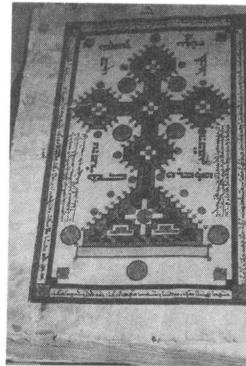
1) Syriac language

Syriac is the Aramaic dialect of Edessa. Syriac became the vernacular and written language of the Roman provinces of Mesopotamia, Syria and their neighbours, as far as Palestine and Persia. The home of classical Syriac was Edessa and its province of Osroene which became Christian in the 2nd century. Syriac remained the language of the majority of the people of those areas who were converts to Christianity.



Syriac was maintained in widespread use as a literary language until the end of the 13th century, even after Arabic began to be the main vernacular language of the Middle East from the end of the 7th century. The Syriac language remained the basis and a sign of interior unity for the Syrian Orthodox, and continues to be used on a small scale as a literary language even today. It is linked to their faith as the patristic and liturgical language. Syriac is still used for the liturgy.

Estrangelo is the earliest form of the Syriac alphabet consisting of



somehow rounded characters and it was in use until about the 12 or 13th century. From 17th century the writing of the West Syrians known as *Serto*, that is in li or cursive writing, was developed.

After the 14th century the Christian literature of the Middle East was written mostly in Arabic. Since the late Middle Ages Syriac Orthodox manuscripts have been often written, in Arabic-speaking areas, in *Garshuni*, that is in Arabic written in Syriac letters.

Today the Arabic dialect spoken in Sadad, near Homs in Syria, includes 500 words of Syriac origin.

Some modern Syriac dialects are still spoken by Syrian Orthodox, such as *Turoyo* in the area of Tur Abdin, modern Turkey, and *Sureth* in villages around Mosul, Iraq. Today the daily language of the Syrian Orthodox in the Middle East and in some Turkish places close to Syria, and in Iraq, is mostly Arabic. In Turkey they also speak Turkish and even Kurdish in the northern Tur Abdin area.

West Syriac is also the language of the Maronites linked to the Church of Rome since the Crusades. Certain Eastern or Chalcedonian Orthodox of the Antiochian region used Syriac in the liturgy at least until the 17th century. Some also used to speak it and a modern west Aramaic dialect



is still used in Maalula, near Damascus in Syria. Until the 17th c. the seals of the hegumens of the Chalcedonian Balamand Monastery near Tripoli, Lebanon, were written in Syriac letters. Eastern Syriac used by the faithful of the Church of the East is distinguished from Western Syriac in script and in certain features of pronunciation, mainly in long "a" instead of "o".

2) Manuscripts in Syriac

Manuscripts in Syriac bear witness to great literary activity and some go back to the 5th and 6th centuries. There are still over 50 very ancient manuscripts of different parts of the Bible in Syriac dating from the 5th to the 7th century. The most ancient manuscript in Syriac was copied in Edessa in 411: it is now preserved in the British Library. Many manuscripts are not yet translated. Some are kept by the Syrian Orthodox, especially in the Patriarchate and in the new centre for Syriac studies in Ma'arat Saydnaya. Since the 17th century more than 2,000 have been exported and are now in famous libraries, in London, the Vatican, Paris, Berlin, Birmingham, Cambridge and the USA; others are to be found in the Monastery of Saint Catherine of Sinai, Iraq, Turkey and Lebanon, etc.

Due to the difficulties experienced throughout history many monasteries, libraries and churches were destroyed and many precious manuscripts have disappeared for ever.

3) Syriac studies

The first Syriac studies developed especially in the School called 'of the Persians' in Edessa, a centre of religious and scientific studies, founded at the end of the 4th century. Its scope widened at the beginning of the 5th century, when Greek studies were developed by bishops Rabbula (+435) and Ibas (d.457). The school was closed in 489 and then transferred to Nisibis, in the Persian Empire. Saint Ephrem first taught in Nisibis, and then in Edessa for the last ten years of his life. Similar schools also flourished elsewhere, including the Persian Empire.

Most of the time schools were attached to monasteries which had a pedagogical and cultural function. Not only school education was given there, but also studies at a higher level took place: monks made translations and copied Syriac manuscripts, and important libraries were organised.

From the 4th to the 13th century the most famous Syrian Orthodox schools were located mainly in the following monasteries situated today

in Syria, Turkey and Iraq: Tel' Ade, Mar Mattai, Mar Behnam, Mar Gabriel, Zafaran, Mar Barsauma near Malatya and Mar Zakkai near Raqqah, Qenneshre on the Euphrates, with precise location unknown and with the area now flooded by a new dam.

4) Syriac Literature

a) The Bible

From about the C2 A.D. the Old Testament was translated into Syriac, and a definitive version was produced in the 4th century called the *Peshito*, meaning the 'simple' or 'common' version.

The New Testament is known in Syriac since the second century. There are three ancient versions of the Gospels in Syriac: the Harmony, entitled the *Diatessaron*, composed in Syriac around 170 by Tatian, was the oldest form of the Syriac Gospels, but its original form is now lost; two separate Gospel texts known as the 'Old Syriac' dating from the 3rd century; and the *Peshito* of the New Testament from the early 5th century which became the Bible of the Syriac Churches.

In schools pupils were first taught to read the *Peshito* (Psalms, New and Old Testament), the Syriac and Greek Fathers.

A new edition of the *Peshito* New Testament is being prepared for present day use by Malfono Isa Gülten and others of Mar Gabriel Monastery together with the Bible society.

The New Testament was translated from Syriac to Arabic in about the 8th century, into Persian in 1221 by John of Taflis, into Malayalam by Ramban Philip in India at the beginning of the 19th century and, recently, in 1995, by Rev. Curien Corepiscopa Kaniampampil and, in 1998, by Father Mathew Uppari.

In Syriac literature we also find many commentaries on the Bible.

b) Syriac general literature was formed and developed in Mesopotamia under the influence of Christianity. Early Syriac writers think in pictorial symbols. Later Syrian Orthodox writings include not only exegesis, hermeneutics, theology, history, homilies and asceticism, but also philosophy, geography, grammatical works, philology, lexicography, translations, astronomy, medicine, science and poetry. Famous scholars in these fields are Jacob of Edessa (d.708), Moses bar Kepha (d.903), Dionysius bar Salibi (d.1171), Jacob bar Shakko (d. 1241) and Barhebraeus (d.1286). Such men and others were true scholars and humanists, knowledgeable in many fields. Jacob of Edessa composed the first systematic treatise of Syriac grammar, of which very few copies

exist today. Important extracts were taken from it by Barhebraeus for his grammar, the *Book of Splendours*, in which the two Syriac dialects, oriental and western, are, among other things, explained. In 1228 Doctor Gabriel of Edessa wrote books about philosophy and medicine.

In the field of medicine, we know of some famous Syrian Orthodox physicians. Sergius of Ras al'Ayn (d.536) was the first medical figure in the Syriac speaking world to translate the works of Galen into Syriac. Maphrian Bar Hebraeus was himself a distinguished doctor and composed several medical treatises. Romanus who was a doctor and a monk of Qartamin or Mar Gabriel, wrote about medicine, and he became Patriarch in 887. The mathematician Severus Sebokht (d.667) was one of the first in the Near East to mention the Indian numerals.

The writings of the Church Fathers were translated from Greek into Syriac. Some patristic works written originally in Greek and then lost are now known through translations into Syriac, e.g. Severus of Antioch (d.538). In the first centuries of Islam, the Syriac speaking population was prominent in science and literature: they transmitted to the Arab world, especially under the Abbasids, ancient Greek philosophy and science by their translations into Arabic, often via Syriac translations. This renaissance of sciences, favoured by some enlightened caliphs of Baghdad, began with translations in the 9th century.

The golden age of Syriac literature came to its finest expression especially in the period from the 4th century until the end of the 7th century, and it remained very much alive until the 10th century. Learned authors of the early Arab period include Jacob of Edessa, George bishop of the Arab tribes, John of Dara and Moses bar Kepha. An intellectual Syriac renaissance took place with Dionysius bar Salibi (C 12), Michael the Syrian (C 12) and Bar Hebraeus (C 13) who wrote in Syriac and in Arabic. The great Syriac writers of the Middle Ages combine religious and historical themes. After the Mongol invaders of the 13th and 14th centuries became Muslim, the Syrian Orthodox had less literary output. Many Syrian Orthodox authors of the following centuries are little known and their works have still to be discovered. Some are quoted by Patriarch Ephrem Barsom in his *History of the Syriac sciences and literature*.

c) The Antiochian Fathers until at least 451 are common to the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian traditions. Such is the case of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, who died as martyr in Rome under the Emperor Trajan (98-117). He wrote famous letters in Greek for the early Christian communities which form a catechism, and which are

still spiritually challenging. John Chrysostom was from Antioch. Famous writers of the Syrian Orthodox tradition will be now enumerated. They all wrote in Syriac, and some also in Greek or Arabic.

- Aphrahat (d. after 345), the Persian 'sage', wrote about pastoral matters in his *Demonstrations*, the first major document on asceticism in the Syriac tradition.

- Saint Ephrem (d. 373), the theologian-poet, the "harp of the Holy Spirit", well-known for his biblical exegesis and metrical homilies, or *memre*, and who sang his *madrashé* or doctrinal hymns to the harp, teaching them even to the Daughters of the Covenant. Many are kept in Syriac prayers and remain as models.

Aphrahat and Ephrem are both representatives of a Syriac culture which was still predominantly Semitic in the 4th century.

- The Bishop of Edessa, Rabbula (d.435) is well known for his *Canons* as is also Marutha, the Metropolitan of Tikrit (640).

- Works have circulated under the name of Isaac, at least three people of this name lived in the 5th and 6th centuries; one of them is Isaac of Antioch (d.460?), a pupil of Saint Ephrem.

- Severus of Antioch (d.538) wrote, in Greek, theological treatises, homilies and many letters. These writings survive mostly only in Syriac translation.

- Jacob (d. 521) became the bishop of Batnan, 40 kilometres south-west of Edessa, in the district of Serugh; he is especially known for his hundreds of hymns which made him the 'Flute of the Holy Spirit and the Harp of the believing Church'.

- Philoxenus (d.523), bishop of Mabbug, 80 kilometres north Aleppo, wrote commentaries on the Gospels, 13 homilies on Christian life and perfection, prayers, works on Trinity and Incarnation, professions of faith, and many letters with dogmatic and spiritual interests.

- Jacob (d.708), bishop of Edessa in about 684, completed a revision of the Syriac text of parts of the Old Testament; he was a commentator, theologian, historian, translator, canonist, philosopher and grammarian, and he invented symbols to represent Syriac vowels. His Commentary on the *Hexaemeron* shows an awareness of natural sciences and the geographical studies of his time.

- The most prolific author of the 9th century is Moses bar Kepha (d.903) who became bishop Severus of Mosul. Among other things he wrote biblical commentaries and diverse treatises (homiletics, philosophy, theology and exegesis).

- Among the famous authors in Tikrit during its golden age from the 9th to the 11th centuries, we can name Anthony the Rhetor, author of a work on rhetoric and poetry.

- Dionysius Jacob bar S dibi (d.1171), who became bishop of Marash and Mabbug, and was then transferred to Amid/Diyarbakir, wrote many biblical and liturgical theological commentaries, histories of the Fathers, of the saints and of the martyrs.

- The main work by Michael the Great, (d.1199), abbot of the monastery of Barsauma, a fine scholar and linguist, elected as Patriarch in 1166, is his *Chronicle*.

- Jacob bar S lakko (d.1241), Bishop Severus in Mar Mattai Monastery, wrote his *Dialogues* on philosophy and linguistics, and his *Book of Treasures* on theology.

- Gregorius Abu'l-Faraj (d.1286), or Bar Hebraeus, studied medicine and philosophy. He devoted himself to the study of Syriac and Arabic and, presumably, of Hebrew. In 1264 he was elected as Maphrian of the East. He summarized all the Syrian Orthodox theology of the past (*Candelabra of the Sanctuary*), as well as its exegesis, canon-law (*Nomocanon*), grammar, philosophical and scientific knowledge (physics, astronomy, cosmography, medicine). This made him an encyclopaedist of his church, as well as a well-known historian (*Syriac Chronicle*, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*), spiritual father (*Ethikon* and *Book of the Dove*) and poet.

Murad Fuad Giqqi (+1958), from Mardin, translated Chabot's *Littérature Syriacque* into Arabic.

5) Greek and Syriac languages

From the beginning of Christianity, and even before, around Antioch, in Syriac and Palestine, we can find evidence of the coexistence of the Greek and Syriac languages, because, especially in important hellenized cities, Greek was the administrative, trade and intellectual language, until the rise of Islam.

According to S.P.Brock, the Christian culture and literature written in Greek influenced Syriac writers especially during the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries. Many works written in Greek were translated into Syriac, read in Syriac monastic circles and quoted by Syriac authors. Among them were the Macarian Homilies, Abba Isaia, various Egyptian monastic works, Mark the Hermit, writings attributed to Dionysios the Areopagite and, above all, Evagrius of Pontus (+399). Some works and prayers by Saint

Ephrem were translated into Greek and several other languages when he was still alive. In the early 7th century Paul of Tella translated the Old Testament and Thomas of Harkel the New Testament from Greek into Syriac. Some monasteries were great centres of hellenistic studies. In the late 7th century Jacob of Edessa was involved with Greek learning, teaching and translating. He was among those scholarly monks who formed an essential link in the transmission of the science and philosophy of the Graeco-Roman civilization to the Arab world which in its turn passed them on to the west in the Middle Ages by the way of Spain. In Eastern Orthodox monasteries, like in Balamand in Lebanon, and in Saint Catherine in Sinai, you can see many Chalcedonian liturgical books and manuscripts written in Greek, Arabic and Syriac. Until now Greek words are found in the Syriac lexicon. Severus of Antioch wrote in Greek. Theodore Abu Qurra (9th c), a disciple of Saint John of Damascus, wrote in Greek, Arabic and Syriac. Thus, between the Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians there was no linguistic problem.

6) Syriac language and studies today

What about Syriac studies today?

a) To have a full catalogue of Syriac literature and studies, consult C.Moss, *Catalogue of Syriac Printed Books and Related Literature in the British Museum*, London, 1962, continued by S.Brock in *Syriac Studies: a classified bibliography* 1960-1990, Kaslik, 1996, 184-208.

b) The main collections of Syriac texts with some translations are the *Patrologia Syriaca*, the *Patrologia Orientalis*, the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* and some in *Sources Chrétiennes*, and partial collections such as A.Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies*, *Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic and Garshuni*, 7 vol. Cambridge 1927-33; A.Smith Lewis and M.D.Gibson, *Studia Sinaitica*, 12 vol, Cambridge 1894-1907, with translations.

c) The main scholarly reviews related to Syriac studies are *L'Orient Syrien*, *Le Muséon*, *Oriens Christianus*, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, *Journal of the Iraqi Academy*, *Parole de l'Orient*, *Revue de l'Orient Chétien*, *The Harp*, *Aram*. There is now also an electronic journal of Syriac Studies, called *Hugoye*, on the Internet (<http://www.acad.cua.edu.syrcom.Hugoye>)

d) The main universities where Syriac is taught are Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Paris, Leiden, Groningen, Louvain-la-Neuve, Leuven, Graz, Göttingen, Tübingen, Berlin, Munich, Rome, Harvard, Washington, Toronto and Quebec.

e) The Symposium of Syriac Studies has taken place once every four years since 1970. The Acts are published in *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*. Syriac studies also form part of the International Conferences on Patristic Studies in Oxford, the International Congresses of Asian and North African Studies, and the International Syriac Conferences held once every four years at St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute in Kottayam, SEERI, in Kerala.

In the Syrian Orthodox Seminary of Saint Ephrem in Ma'arat Saydnaya a Syriac Centre is being organised with manuscripts and microfilms for the use of scholars; seminars will take place and publications are expected. The Maronite University in Kaslik near Beirut hopes to open an Institute of Higher Syriac studies.

f) In 1839 the patriarchal vicar Kyrillos Jacob, the future Patriarch Jacob II, had a printing press in Constantinople, and he published one book of Psalms and a prayer book. From 1886 there was a printing press functioning in the Monastery of Zafaran, when the Patriarchate was still in Mardin, which allowed the printing of books. In the 20th century there were other printing presses, such as in the Monastery of St Mark in Jerusalem, in Atshaneh (Lebanon), in Mosul and in Pampakuda (Kerala, India).

From 1985 until 1992 the St Ephrem Monastery in Losser, Holland, had its own printing press and it still publishes a lot.

g) From 1913, and for about one year, the review *al Hikma* (Sophia) was printed in the monastery of Deir Zafaran and continued to be printed from 1927-31 in Jerusalem, and from 1952 for some years in Mardin, and from 1990 again in Jerusalem. Since 1962 the *Review of the Patriarchate*, which was revived on a regular basis by Patriarch Jacob III, remains the most important publication of the Church.

From 1946-7 *al-Mashriq* was printed in Mosul by Bishop Gregorius Paulos Behnam, followed in 1948-52 by *Lisan al Mashriq*.

Since 1978 *Kolo Suryoyo* is the magazine of the Western European diocese edited by Bishop Cicek in the Saint Ephrem monastery in Holland in different languages: German, Suryoyo and Turkish. Since 1986 the magazine *Shemsho* has been printed in Holland.

Sefro Suryoyo is a magazine which was revived in Aleppo by Metropolitan Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim. In Istanbul there is a new Church bulletin, *Yeni Gun Ishri* (The Light of the day). In the USA there are two new Church bulletins.

Metropolitan Gregorius of Aleppo is responsible for many of the recent Mardin publications in Aleppo, in Arabic, Syriac and English, 98

books altogether: "We print Syriac studies, such as books of theology, history and spirituality (patristic, homilies), as well as letters: Mar Severus Patriarch of Antioch wrote more than 3,000 letters. Today all the canons and minutes of the Synods of the Syrian Orthodox Church from 1880-1990 are collected and will be published, as will also be the literature not yet published by Patriarch Barsom, Patriarch Jacob and Bishop Behnam. We have many Syrian Orthodox Fathers, not only the famous Saint Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh: we have to go back and re-study all of them. Some are quoted by Patriarch Barsom in his book *History of the Syriac sciences and literature*, published in Homs in 1943 and in Aleppo in 1956. So many of our Syriac manuscripts are not yet translated. Concerning our history, the 'History' by Michael the Great was translated into Arabic for the first time and it was well received. We must continue to publish such translations in different languages". An article on the publications edited by Metropolitan Yohanna so far can be found in the first number in 1998 of *Hugoye*, by Andrew Palmer.

Metropolitan Cicek of the West European diocese has organised the Bar Hebraeus Verlag in Losser, Holland. He loves the Syriac language and he wants to keep it alive: "Since 1978 we have published books, more than 120, in German, Arabic, Turkish and English, about history, dogmas, the Holy Scriptures and the teaching of Syriac, as well as dictionaries, biographies of the saints, hymns and prayers. I copied by hand several prayer and hymn books which were then printed. Many of the liturgical books and others printed in Syriac were made for the use of the community around the world and in Turkey".

We should also mention the liturgical books printed in English by Metropolitan Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel in Lodi, New Jersey, USA.

h) It seems that the *Guide of the Assyrians* (1909), *Star of the East* (1910-12), and *Wake up* (1913-15) were the first newspapers published in East Turkey but they all ceased publication at the time of the massacres.

From 1927-46 *Lishono d-Umto* (Language of the nation) was printed in Beirut.

Today there are about 15 main newspapers published by Syrian Orthodox around the world such as in Sweden (*Babro Suryoyo* from 1979, *Nsibin* from 1987, *Aram* from 1991, etc); in Turkey (one is *Kolo Tur Abdin*); several in the USA and in India, and in other countries.

i) The first Patriarchal theological seminary of the present time started in the Monastery of Deir Zafaran in 1905, but its activities were

stopped by the events of 1914. It was reorganised as minor seminary from the 1950's until the 1970's. In 1955 a seminary was re-organised in Mar Gabriel Monastery in Tur Abdin.

Patriarch Barsom organised, in Zahlah in Lebanon, another seminary which existed there from 1939 until 1945, when it was moved to Mosul. Then, in 1961, it was transferred back to Zahlah and in 1968 it was settled in Atshaneh over Beirut. In 1978 it was, for two years, in Damascus because of the Lebanese war, then back to Atshaneh in 1980 for 1 or 2 years and back to Damascus near the Patriarchate in 1982.

Other seminaries were also functioning: one in 1923 in the Monastery of Mar Mattai, and another one in 1960-63 in the Monastery of Saint Mark in Jerusalem.

Today there is a minor seminary in Mosul which started about 10 years ago. The major Seminary is now located in Ma'arat Saydnaya near



Damascus, and was opened in September 1996 and can host about 100 students. There is also a theological school in India, in Vetikel, 25 kilometres east of Cochin.

Some monasteries continue to play a decisive role in the spreading spirituality and culture to



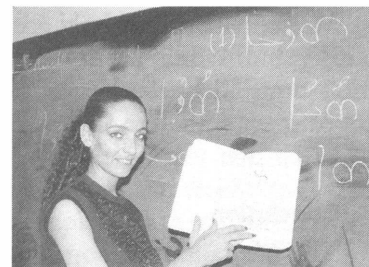
the communities.

j) In 1838 it seems that a school was opened in Deir Zafaran. I also found references to a 'model' school which existed in Diyarbakir from 1860-71, and of two school rooms in Mardin under Patriarch Peter IV. In Adana in 1918 there was a big primary school: some of the pupils were orphans who lost their parents during the massacres. In 1923 the school was transferred to Beirut and organised as orphanage.



In Syria, Lebanon and Iraq there were recently 16 Syrian Orthodox

nurseries, 18 primary schools, 7 secondary schools and one high school, where Syriac and religious education were also taught. In Syria and Lebanon the teachers are paid by the Church.



k) Classical Syriac, or *Suryoyo*, is still taught today, not only for reading and writing, but also for singing in the church; mostly in the Seminaries, in some monasteries, in many of the Syrian Orthodox churches, schools and Sunday schools; in the Middle East and in diaspora; to children and adults.

There is definitely renewed enthusiasm for studying Syriac.

In Bar Hebraeus Verlag in Holland, in Qamishli and in Aleppo, many books for teaching Syriac have been printed. Malfono Abraham Nuro of Aleppo is active in teaching Syriac in Aleppo and elsewhere; he wrote in 1989 a book to teach Syriac, or *Suryoyo*, with tapes and videos, entitled *Suloko*. So classical Syriac is not a dead language of the ancient liturgy and Church Fathers, but it is still used. *Suryoyo* is spoken mostly in the Patriarchate, in the Seminaries, in the monasteries and by some clergy and even some laypeople. It can be written and it is the one taught. The language spoken at home by Syrian Orthodox from Tur Abdin, Jazirah and emigrants from these places is *Turoyo*, a dialect which is rather rarely written. The Syriac dialect still spoken in villages around Mosul is called *Sureth*.

Especially in Jazirah, and above all in Qamishli, they give priority to the teaching of *Suryoyo*. All year round, but especially during the summer, intensive courses in Syriac are organised, in Jazirah up to three hours a day and six days a week! Specific courses in Syriac are also organised for the deacons.

In the 20th century some Syrian Orthodox scholars did their best to keep the Syriac language alive by writing and teaching. Among them were Patriarchs Ephrem I Barsaum and Yacob III, Bishop Philoxenos Yohanna Dolabani, archdeacon Ni'mat-Allah Danno (+1951) from Mosul, Father Elias Shaya (+1970) from Bartalla. Abd Mesiha Na'man d-Qarahbas, born in 1903 near Diyarbakir (+1980) and Yohanna Qashiso have published books to teach Syriac. Many others, such as Dehno Makdassi Elias from Adana living now in Brazil and Ibrahim Saoma who died in Brazil, have contributed to keep the Syriac patrimony alive, by articles and books.

Metropolitan Cicek told me: "Syriac is the language of our Church, history and tradition. Some young people want to learn Syriac, but it takes time. In Europe, permission has been given to teach *Suryoyo* in government schools in Germany, Austria, Holland and Sweden".

Conclusion

Mar Matta, the Bishop of Jazirah said to me: "We are proud of our Syriac language. Even if some of our people don't understand when they pray, they say they need it. In Qamishli we have an annual festival for Syriac language, calligraphy and songs, and young people write poems



and short stories in classical Syriac and also in *Turoyo*. In Qamishli most of the people still speak *Turoyo* at home, which shows that our language is still alive. But it is not enough to pray in Syriac: the spiritual and theological meaning of the liturgical texts should also be explained in Arabic or in another spoken language.



In Qamishli, a student told me: "When I have children the most important task for me will be to teach them *Turoyo*, the Syriac dialect of Turkey, which my grandmother taught me. I feel at home when I speak it with anyone. It helps our people and Church to keep alive. I also prefer

to pray in Syriac, in the language of our Church". For Syrian Orthodox, the language is one of the most important element of their identity. When I asked ten year old children in Aleppo if they like learning Syriac, they answered yes, because they learn their own language, they learn the language of their prayers and faith, because they learn many things about Christ, the Virgin and the saints.

Tony Saliba, from Beirut, 18 years old, after reading a passage of the Gospel, decided to study theology, in order to live according to the Bible, not



only by reading it, but by entering into the spirit of its teaching. He is now teaching Syriac and working with youth in Beirut. His favourite subject is Syriac: "It is important to teach Syriac to the children, at least the principal prayers, because it cannot be separated from our Church tradition and from our life. But it is also very important that the children understand the prayers in their own language and receive the spiritual nourishment from them. We have to explain to them the meaning of the prayers and show them the treasures of the Church in Syriac liturgy and spirituality. The most important thing is that the young people understand how to lead a spiritual life from their earliest days. The Church is like a bird which cannot fly without its two wings, one being tradition and the other being spirituality. We have to keep and to transmit this spiritual life to our people".

Like Bishop Matta, Archbishop Yohanna of Aleppo insisted that it is important not only to learn Syriac but also to learn what is behind the language, that is Syriac religious studies. So, in order to dig even more deeply into the Syriac patrimony, the youth is encouraged to study Syriac. Some Syrian Orthodox young people begin academic studies in Syriac language and literature. In addition to literary sources, important information is to be found in inscriptions, in art and in archaeology. Syria in the 4th-6th centuries was a centre of great artistic expression in many fields, architecture, painting, liturgy, etc. Thus studies in Syriac iconography, history of art and archeology should not be overlooked. Early Syriac iconography may still be seen, for instance, in surviving paintings from Dura, in the illustrations of the Rabbula Gospels, and in several other illustrated Gospels.

The Syrian Orthodox Church is on the Internet: <http://www.netadventure.com/NSOC/>. Another useful address on the Internet is *Suryoyo Online*, run by Gabriel Rabo from Göttingen: [http://www.gwdg.de/\(N check sign\)grabo/suryoyo](http://www.gwdg.de/(N%20check%20sign)grabo/suryoyo).

There is a project to produce video-cassettes and illustrated volumes by Trans World Film Italy (1, via Paolo Braccini, 00128 Rome, fax 06/5083801) on the Aramaic Heritage of the Syrian Orthodox Church, with Dr Sebastian Brock as President of the Academic Advisory Committee.

Liturgical Life

The Syrian Orthodox liturgical tradition is one of the richest and most beautiful to be found in the Christian spiritual heritage. There theological poetry is woven out of biblical material in praise of Holy Trinity and God who became Man for the economy of salvation, as well as the Mother of God and all the saints. The words of the liturgies, hymns and prayers, repeated by the faithful throughout the centuries, are the expression of the Syrian Orthodox faith.

The liturgy of the first centuries was dominated by Antioch and, through Saint John Chrysostom, among others, influenced the liturgy of Constantinople. Around Antioch, in the hellenized big cities, the liturgy was celebrated in Greek, elsewhere the use of Syriac was dominant. According to Father Taft, the well-known liturgist, three principal liturgical centres had a major influence in the origins of the Syrian Orthodox rite: Jerusalem, Antioch (mostly in Greek) and Edessa (in Syriac). The Syrian Orthodox rite is a synthesis of native Syriac elements, especially hymns, with material translated from Greek liturgical texts from Antioch and Jerusalem. This combination was made by Syriac speaking monks in the hinterlands of Syria, Palestine and parts of Mesopotamia.

Hymns play an important role. Original Syriac compositions are ascribed to theologian poets, such as saint Ephrem (d. 373) or Jacob of Serugh (450-521). Saint Ephrem can be considered as the Father of all the Syriac liturgical traditions which developed throughout the centuries, and which are found even in translations and adaptations in the Greek, Armenian and later Slavonic prayers, especially in hymnography.

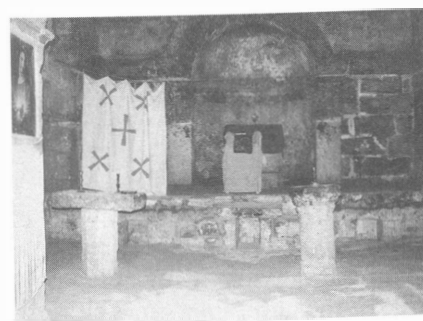
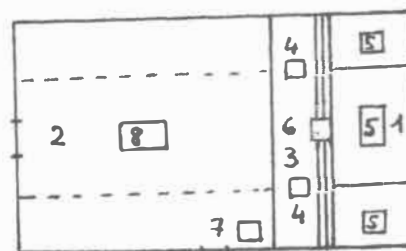
Besides the famous anonymous commentary on the liturgy under the name of George Bishop of the Arab tribes, other authors, like Jacob of Edessa, John of Dara, Moses bar Kepha, Dionysius bar Salibi (d. 1171), and Bar Hebraeus also wrote commentaries on the liturgy.

Concerning the passage of the synagogal rite to the early christian rite, it is assumed that Christianity has been greatly influenced by its Jewish heritage, especially in the Syriac tradition.

1) Description of Church buildings

Before presenting the West Syriac liturgical life and customs, let us describe in a schematic way the inside lay-out of churches.

In Northern Syria, especially between Antioch and Aleppo, hundreds of churches, mostly ruined, testify to ancient Christian activity. The churches of Qirk Bize and Qalb Loze and surroundings are typical architectural examples. There is further evidence of ancient churches in Tur Abdin and Northern Iraq.



The traditional Syrian Orthodox church is divided into three parts: sanctuary (*beth qudsho*) (1), nave (*haiklo*) (2), and *gestromo* (3) for the choir and deacons, which is one step up from the nave, with two lecterns (4) (sing. *gudo*) for prayers and readings, which are read or sung by two choirs in an alternating manner. The church is of rectangular shape with either one or three naves, and up to three altars (sing. *madbho*) (5) in large churches.

The altar must be consecrated. When a liturgy is celebrated, a piece of consecrated wood called *tablito* must be on the altar under the liturgical cloth and vessels. Over the altar there is sometimes a 'baldachino' which is said to be a symbol of the tabernacle of Moses, or of Heaven.



On the altar, there is a little cupboard (*beth qurbono*), in which the sacrament for the sick is usually placed after the liturgies. The altar vessels are similar to those in the Byzantine use.

The sanctuary is reached by three steps. In it is the altar which symbolizes heaven, while the nave represents earth. It is separated from the choir by a large curtain which is drawn when there is no service taking place, and at certain solemn moments of the liturgy like the fraction, the epiclesis and the communion of the clergy. In some churches it is possible to find a small curtain in front of the main altar. Their liturgical use goes back to the end of the 4th century. The large curtain corresponds to the iconostasis in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

When there is no liturgy, the gospel is exposed on a special lectern (6), called the *golgotha* (Syr. *gogultho*), in front of the large altar curtain.

The baptismal font (7) stands generally at the right of the nave, usually in the front (south) part.

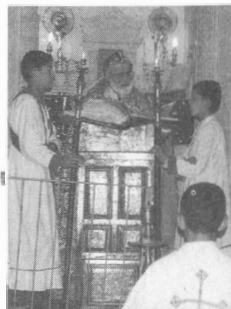
On the left when you enter the church from the west door, there are usually relics of saints, in the house of the saints (*beth qadishe*). This place is called *beth sohde* if there are relics of martyrs. Bishops can be buried inside the church, sometimes in the *beth qadishe*, or even under one of the secondary altars on the side. Icons are found mostly there and at the entrance of the church, but also elsewhere. Icons and other paintings represent the main feasts and saints. Wall paintings are to be found: some ancient ones can be seen in Syria (Sadad, Mar Mousa); some were re-discovered recently in the main church of Deir Suryani in Wadi Natrun in Egypt where Syrian Orthodox monks used to reside.

In very ancient churches we sometimes find what is called the *bema* (8), a chancel or platform in the middle of the nave, sometimes elevated, which was used for readings and for chanting. In the Jewish synagogue there still is a *bema* for the reading of the Torah.

2) Eucharistic liturgy

The Syriac word for the eucharistic liturgy is *qurbono* or *eukharistia*, of which the former means 'offering'. It consists of several basic parts: the Preparation, the Trisagion, the Scripture readings, the Creed, the Kiss of peace; then the part called the Anaphora, followed by the Communion and the Dismissal.

Traditionally there are up to 3 readings from the Old Testament and 3 from New Testament:



Acts, Epistle and Gospel. Sometimes a Catholic Epistle replaces the Acts. During the reading of the Gospel two candles are held on each side.

In the Syriac rite the Kiss of Peace is passed down from the sanctuary to the people, being conveyed to each row in turn by a deacon or subdeacon, enfolding his hands over folded hands of recipient, until he reaches the back of the church. The recipient then passes the Peace on to her/his neighbour.

The *Book of Life*, or *Sefro d'haye* (i.e. diptychs with names of dead people) used to be read before the kiss of peace, on Sundays and great Feasts of the Lord. It includes the life of Christ and the names of Old Testament figures and prophets, apostles, evangelists, martyrs, saints, holy Fathers, ascetics, monks and nuns, and devout lay believers, as well as a list of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchs of Antioch, of some Maphrians, bishops and clergy.



As Syrian Orthodox authors testify, there was a procession of the gifts, as in the Byzantine tradition, after the dismissal of the catechumens, until at least the 13th century.

The central part of the liturgy called *anaphora* includes the consecration of bread and wine, the *Anamnesis* or "remembrance" with the memorial of

the institution, the *Epiklesis*, or Invocation of the Holy Spirit and the long prayers of intercessions. The communion rite includes the



prayer of Fraction, the Lord's Prayer, the great Elevation, the Communion and the Prayer of Thanksgiving,

followed by the Blessing and Dismissal of the faithful, and the post communion prayers. The basic structure of the Anaphora is quite similar to that of the anaphora of St John Chrysostom.

The gifts in chalice and paten are veiled during the offertory. After lifting up the veil, which is said to figure the stone on Christ's tomb, the

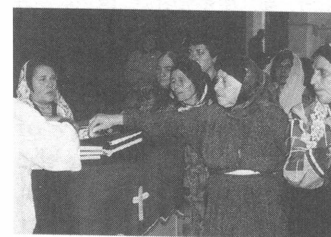


priest moves it up and down over the gifts (bread and wine). After the anamnesis comes the

invocation of the Holy Spirit. At that time the priest's hands hover over the gifts, the right being over the paten and the left over the chalice. Then the consecration begins in which the right hand alone of the priest hovers over the gifts as a symbol of the descent of the Holy Spirit.



The priest descends the steps from the altar in order to give communion from a chalice directly with his hand.

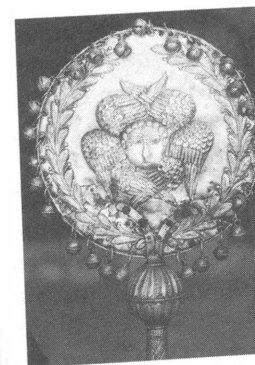


After this he gives the blessing. A final prayer is said in front of the altar. Usually people kiss the Gospel and they take some blessed bread before leaving the church. The priest consumes the rest of the holy gifts while saying prayers and then washes the altar vessels before departing.

At certain moments, for instance when reading the Gospel, at the offertory, the moments of the consecration and the *epiclesis*, and before the communion, *marwaho* (sing. *marwah*), are waved. These are liturgical fans, often metal discs with symbols of the figures of the cherubims and seraphims on top of the



poles, and with bells attached. They are used to underline the importance of the liturgical actions.



3) Anaphoras

The anaphora is the central part of the Eucharistic liturgy. More than 80 anaphoras are known. Many are attributed to famous Syrian Orthodox figures, such as Mar Jacob of Serugh (d. 521), Mar Severus of Antioch (d. 538), Mar Philoxenus of Mabbug (d. 532), Mar Dionysius Jacob Bar Salibi (d. 1171), Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), as well as Maphrian Marutha (d. 649), John Bishop of Dara and his contemporary Dionysius of Tell Mahre (9th c.), Moses bar Kepha (d. 903), and Michael the Great (d. 1199).

The two most most commonly used eucharistic *anaphoras* are that of the Twelve Apostles (Antioch) and that of Saint James (Jerusalem). Parts of the former have close parallels in the Greek Anaphora of St John Chrysostom.

Apart from these two, new compositions have multiplied during the centuries. Most of the *anaphoras* and other liturgical writings were composed between the 5/6th and the 14th centuries. Some carry the names of Apostles or Church Fathers: St. Mark, St. Peter, St. John the Evangelist, St. Xystus and St. Julius of Rome, St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyril of Alexandria, etc. Any *anaphora* may be chosen for celebrating the Eucharist. But the *anaphora* attributed to Saint James, the first bishop of Jerusalem, must be used for all feasts of the Lord, for the ordination of clergy, by a newly ordained priest for his first liturgy and on any altar where a priest is celebrating for the first time.

The basic structure of the Syriac Anaphoras is very similar to that of the Greek ones composed by saint John Chrysostom and saint Basil; the small differences include (a) the Creed comes before the Offertory and Peace in the Syriac (=Antiochene) rite, but after it in the Byzantine rite.

(b) The Fraction comes before the "Our Father" in the Syriac rite, but after in the Byzantine. (c) "The expression such as 'who was crucified for us' in the Trisagion hymn can be understood only in christological interpretation", (Official Subcommittees, Damascus, February 1998).

4) The liturgical books

We have just seen that for the celebration of the Eucharist the main book used by the priest is the *Book of Anaphoras*. The modern book usually contains 10 to 15 *anaphoras* and it includes the liturgical text recited before and after the *anaphora*. The readings from the Gospel are read directly from a separate Gospel Lectionary, and those from the Acts and Epistles from another Lectionary containing these. A reference guide to the biblical readings throughout the year is to be found in the *Mehawyono d-Qeryone*. Special texts for festivals are found in the book *Ma'de'dono*.

During the liturgy the deacons and subdeacons use the book *Tekso d-gurobo*. There is also a special book of hymns, *Qinotho*, used by the deacon and people only for the liturgy, all the year round, including festivals and the Great Fast.

The book of ordination rites for all clergy (singer, subdeacon to Patriarch), and for profession of monks and nuns, is called *Omologia*. For the consecration of *myron*, or holy oil, of new buildings (churches, monasteries), of an altar, of *tablitho*, of icons, there is another book called *Kudusho*.

The sacraments of baptism, marriage and the office for burial of the dead are put in special *Tekso* ('order') books.

The book *Kronikon* is like a Church calendar (*Surgodo*) giving the dates of the moveable feast days for each year, for instance Nineveh day or Easter day, together with the days of the feasts of the saints.

The book *Slawotho d'Kohne* is the book used by the priest for all prayers in the church and when visiting people, for blessings, confession, for the sick, etc. It includes the *anaphora* of Saint James.

The monks and nuns have their book of prayers called *Shbitho* with all Psalms and the simple Seven Daily offices (*slutho*), without *qolo*, *eqbo*, etc.

Kthobo d'Qandelo, is a long and elaborate service for the anointing of the sick, and is penitential in character.

Apart from the Gospel and the Psalter (often just called 'David'), the main books used for the daily Offices are the *Shehimo*, *Fanqitho*, and *Hussoyo*.

The book called *Shehimo*, meaning simple, is used for ordinary week

days, with psalms and hymns, but without biblical readings. The book called *Tekso d' Slutho* contains only midday prayers.

The festal hymnary called *Fanqitho*, meaning volume, is a book gathering different hymns for Sundays and feasts of the year and of selected saint's days.

Hussoyo is the book with the prayers known as *sedre* for feasts, Sundays, days of saints, Lent and the Holy Week.

Some of these books were translated into English in India, some in America. There are also several translations in German.

5) Daily Offices

There are seven canonical offices of the day, namely: evening prayer/vespers (*ramsho*), compline (*suturo*), the midnight office (*lilyo*), matins (*safro*), third hour (*tloth sho'in*), sixth hour or midday prayer (*sheth sho'in*), and ninth hour (*tsha sho'in*).

The seven offices of the day are usually divided into 2 groups: one part in the evening (ninth hour/ vespers/compline) and the other four in the morning. The midnight prayer is the first prayer said in the early morning.

The seven offices are composed of psalms, canticles, and poetical hymns composed from the 4th century onwards. Prominence is given to hymns glorifying God, the Virgin Mother of God and the saints.

A schema of the main daily Offices and a glossary of some liturgical terms, prepared by S.P. Brock, are given at the end of this book.

6) Various types of Hymns

In the Syriac tradition hymns have become a most important liturgical element, and are to be found in all liturgical books. Hymns, inspired by the Holy Scriptures and composed in Syriac are very numerous. Some go back to the time of Saint Ephrem and other Syriac Fathers such as Jacob of Serugh whose hymn on the chariot of Ezekiel is found in the liturgy. Mar Balai, Rabbula, Marutha and Said bar Sabouni (d.1095), and bishop John of Melitene, also wrote several hymns.

Among the oldest, and best known kind of hymns are the *madroshe*, which are didactic poems, or series of lyrical strophes of didactic content sung by a soloist while the choir repeats a refrain after each one. Most of those in the liturgical books (such as *Fanqitho*) are ascribed to saint Ephrem. Saint Ephrem's choirs of virgins sang *madroshe*.

Patriarch John III (+648) is the most famous for the *sedre* he wrote.

Marutha of Tikrit, Athanasius of Balad (+686?), Bar Salibi, Michael the Great are also well-known for their *sedre*.

The *sughitho*, a type of *madroshe* with short stanzas, are hymns sometimes in the form of a dialogue, and/or with an alphabetic acrostic. Some go back to the time of St Ephrem, and another master of these was Jacob of Serugh.

Other constituent elements of the office are the *mimre* or homilies in verse, often of a narrative character. These poems in couplets which were read in metrical form are attributed, for instance, to Saint Ephrem, Isaac of Antioch and Jacob of Serugh. Mar Balai (5th c.), bishop of Balis/Maskane, near Aleppo, wrote *mimre* which are used in daily matins and in vespers. St Ephrem's famous *mimro* on the prophet Jonah and the Repentance of Nineveh is used in the fast of the Ninevites.

In the 6th century, Simeon Quqoyo, a potter, is said to have created a genre of hymn called *quqitho/quqoyo*, which today often has 4 stanzas.

Rabbula (d. 435), bishop of Edessa, wrote hymns called *takshefto* dedicated to the Virgin, the saints, for repentance and for the departed.

Hymns by later anonymous writers are generally known as *qole* (sing. *qolo*).

7) Church music

Another important liturgical book is the *Beth Gazo*, meaning treasury, (often called *Octoechos*), which concerns Church music. It is a repertory of all the Syrian Orthodox melodies and hymns, including those for festivals. It is the oldest official song book. An earlier collection of hymns is attributed to Severus of Antioch (d.538), translated by Bishop Paul of Edessa (early 7th century) and revised later by Jacob of Edessa (d.708). The old collection connected with Severus was not yet arranged according to the 8 tones. This is different from the Byzantine and later Syriac *Ochtoechos*. The present Syriac *Ochtoechos* dates from the Middle Ages. *Beth Gazo* corresponds approximately to the Greek *Hirmologion*.

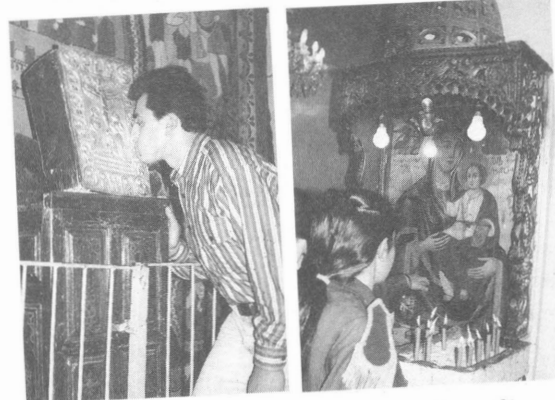
In the seven Daily offices, psalms and hymns are sung according to the 8 tones usually known by number. Syrian Orthodox put them in categories called cold/hot, wet/dry, joyful/mourning, active/passive. The modal method is more complicated than in the Byzantine tradition, as there are two tones used during the same week. After Easter, for instance, the first tone alternates with the fifth every two days, the second alternates with the sixth, and so on. Each tone has its specific usage, for instance for the dead the sixth or eighth tone which are more

doleful are sung; for the joy of Easter the first tone is used. There is a specific type of music used during the time of Great Lent. The manner of singing may differ from one place to another (Tur Abdin, Mardin, Mosul etc.).

Mr Nuri Iskandar is musician in Aleppo. He recently wrote down the notes of the *Beth Gazo*. His project is to register every song and tone of the western Syriac tradition to teach the Syrian Orthodox around the world. The beautiful Syrian Orthodox liturgical music is now available on tapes and CD. Dr George Kiraz put the whole *Beth Gazo* with the voice of Patriarch Jacob III on Internet.

8) Prayer life in the church

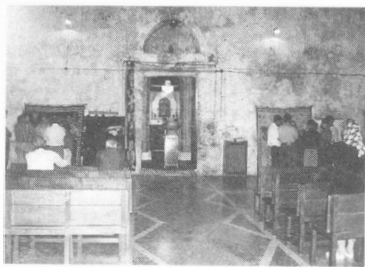
When entering and leaving the church faithful kiss the Gospel. They sign their forehead with oil from the lamp which burns in front of the icons, they kiss the icons and relics if some are found, and light candles. According to tradition, Abgar, a King of Edessa, received a cloth with the face of Christ printed on: this picture is said to be the prototype of the icons of Christ in the Orthodox tradition.



There is a Syriac prayer for the blessing of icons.

Traditionally the prayers are sung in Syriac. As it was said in the previous chapter, Syriac is closely related to the Aramaic of Palestine which was the language spoken by Jesus Christ. Nowadays the Gospel is usually read in Arabic or in the local language, while words of consecration and more solemn parts are said in Syriac. The liturgy and prayers have been translated into Arabic, into Malayalam in India; and they are being translated into English, German, Dutch, Swedish, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. Sometimes they are printed together with the Syriac text written in the original alphabet or even in a phonetic transcription.

For the prayers of the hours, in the *qostromo* there are two choirs, sometimes answering each other, and sometimes singing or reciting



alone. They stand around the lecterns (*gude*) on which the prayer books are placed. Some initial and final prayers are recited silently. Prayers are accompanied by prostrations, especially during the Great Fast, but not on Sundays and feast days.

Usually men stand on the right side of the church, and women on the left side or, even, at the back, in the traditional manner, but nowadays they are mixed in some churches.

Concerning vestments the Patriarch, Bishops and monks always wear a small hood (*'skimo*) embroidered with thirteen crosses and falling



back to the shoulders. For celebrating the liturgy married priests wear a little flat cap (*firo*) similar to the Jewish men's cap (*kippa*), the

white ample alb (*kuthino*) and the *hemnikho* which is like the Byzantine *epitrakhilion*, a stole consisting of a strip of material hanging down in front from the neck. The Patriarch and bishops also

wear a large hood (*masneftho*), the *hemnikho* and the *patriarkhil* (which is similar to the *hemnikho*, but with an additional back piece), on top of all liturgical vestments. All clergy wear the belt (*zunoro*) and the cuffs (*zende*), and on top of all the cope (*faino*) which can be very colourful. Special slippers (*m'sone*) are prescribed for the celebrants and deacons during the Eucharist.

In daily life bishops wear black tunics with a red belt, or a black open mantle with large sleeves and one button at the neck (*maathro*) over a



black cassock, and a black shaped turban (*qawugh*). They wear an episcopal cross on the chest and carry a stick in daily life (*butro*), and also during the liturgy (*muro-nitho*). Priests wear a round black skull cap (*kusitho*) and a



black cassock (*aba*) under the *juba*.

The *juba* is a black open gown with wide sleeves worn by all clergy and also monks who are not priests, both

for the prayers of the hours and also for going outdoors.

The Great Fast takes place seven weeks before Easter. During the fasts animal food is not eaten. The yearly fasts are six: Nineveh, Lent, the Apostles, the Dormition, the Cross and Christmas, in addition to the Wednesdays and Fridays. The three day fast of Nineveh, which recalls the prophet Jonah announcing the divine chastisement precedes the Great Fast. There is a three day fast before the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul on June 29th.

9) The Liturgical Year

The liturgical year is divided into seven seasons of seven weeks each according to the feasts of the Lord: 1) the Annunciation, 2) Nativity, Baptism and Epiphany, 3) the Great Fast and Passion week, 4) the Resurrection and Pentecost, 5) the Apostles, 6) the Transfiguration, 7) the Cross. The days of each week are dedicated as follows: Wednesday to the Virgin, Friday to the Cross, Saturday to the dead and Sunday to the Resurrection. Mar Ephrem Barsom (d. 1957) wrote in *The Golden Key to divine Worship* that the Church year should begin on the 8th Sunday before Christmas. This first Sunday is called Consecration of the Church, the second the Rededication of the Church. The six Sundays before Christmas are dedicated to the annunciations to Zechariah and the Mother of God; the visitation of the Virgin Mary to

Elisabeth; the birth of John the Baptist; the revelation to Joseph; and the last is the Sunday before the Nativity of our Lord.

a) *The Feasts of the Lord, Great Fast, Holy Week*

The Birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ, commonly called Christmas Day, is feasted on December 25th since the adoption of the Gregorian (New) Calendar in the 1954 Synod of Homs. On January the 1st the



Circumcision of Christ is celebrated. On Epiphany (*Eedo d'Denbo*), on January the 6th, there is a procession and blessing of water. February the 2nd is the feast of the Presentation of Christ in the temple: before the procession, at the close of the *quqlum* of the Mother of God, the celebrant carries the cross in his arms, in the likeness of the aged Simeon carrying Jesus Christ. There is also the blessing of candles.



On the Wednesday in the middle of the Great Fast the Gospel of the temptation in the desert (Mat. 4:1-11) is read. Most Sundays in the Great Fast are dedicated to some of the great miracles of Christ: the wedding in Cana at which the water was changed into wine; the healing of the leprous man and the paralysed man; the daughter of the Canaanite woman and the man born blind. The parable of the Good Samaritan is read on the 5th Sunday of Lent.

On Palm Sunday, during the liturgy, a procession is made with candles and olive or palm branches and the faithful throw palms leaves or olive

branches in the direction of the Gospel while it is being read.



During Holy Week, on Maundy Thursday (or Thursday of the Holy Mysteries) a liturgy is celebrated in



the morning, and in the afternoon, the bishop or priest washes the feet of preferably twelve priests and/or deacons/subdeacons representing the Disciples. The one who represents Peter must be a married priest or deacon. When the celebrant washes the feet, he shall say the following prayer for each one of the twelve: "May the Lord God wash away from you all the behaviour of the old man and renew you in spirit and in truth and all of us with you".

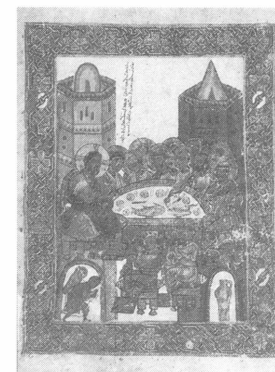
Myron used to be consecrated on that day, but now the Patriarch does it whenever necessary.

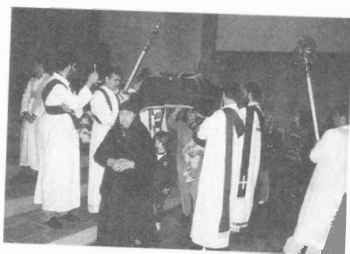


On the Friday of the Passion, at the close of the third hour, there is a procession during which the celebrant carries the cross on the right shoulder, to signify the carrying of His Cross by our Lord from Pilate's palace to Golgotha. Back in front of the sanctuary, the cross, bare and stripped, is fixed on a stand with two lighted candles, one on each side, signifying the two thieves who were crucified with our Lord. At the midday Gospel reading, where it says 'but



the other rebuked Him (Luke 23:40)', then the candle on the left of the cross which signifies the bandit who blasphemed against our Lord should be broken. At the Gospel reading, in the 9th hour, where it says that darkness fell upon the whole earth, the lights in the church must be put out. At the close

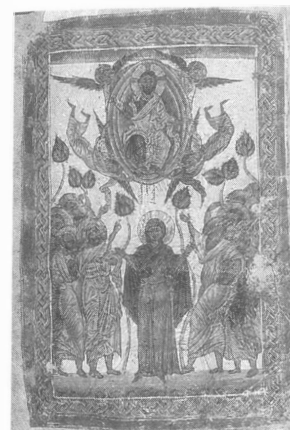




of the ninth hour, the cross is taken down from the stand and put on a table. Then begins the service of the adoration of the Cross. There is another procession with the Cross around the church. Then the service of the Burial of the Cross takes place. The celebrant mixes vinegar with myrrh in a

basin and moistens the Cross, and he washes it with rose water, to symbolize the washing of our Lord's Body by Joseph and Nicodemus before they buried Him. Then the Cross must be embalmed with frankincense, covered with pure cotton and wrapped in a fine linen cloth and put in a box symbolizing the coffin. At the end of the prayers the faithful "visit" the coffin and pass underneath it and they drink of the bitter mixture to remind themselves of the passion and the sufferings of our Saviour. Then the 'coffin' with the cross is usually placed inside the altar, at the back, where a special place is carved. The place is sealed with wax, as a symbol of the tomb of Christ, and candles are lit.

On Saturday night the coffin is moved out from under the altar and is opened. The "tomb" is left open. The cross is washed with rose water and decorated with a red silk scarf (Is.63:1). There is no light in the church. Then the clergy comes in front of the altar to announce the Resurrection of Christ to the faithful with candles and the priests say in a loud voice: "My brethern, I bring you new glad tidings, Christ has risen



from the tomb and has struck His enemies behind Him"; and people answer: "We believe and confess that He has risen indeed". Then the cross is put on a stand in front of the altar with two lighted candles on either side. A procession with the cross, candles and songs precedes the communion. At the end of the liturgy the faithful kiss the cross as if they were kissing the risen Christ. This cross, wrapped in a red scarf, is kept on the stand, in front of the sanctuary, till the feast of the Ascension. The date of Easter follows the Orthodox tradition.

On Monday after Easter a liturgy is celebrated for the dead and the families visit the graveyards.

A daily liturgy should be celebrated until Ascension, if possible.

At Pentecost, during the liturgy, after the Gospel (John 14:1-17) all kneel to prepare themselves for the coming of the Comforter. The deacon goes around the church three times sprinkling the faithful, using leaves, traditionally of walnuts, with blessed water, to signify the gifts of the Holy Spirit that descended upon the Disciples in the Upper Room. The priest then repeats three times: "Stand up by the power of God".

On August 6th the Transfiguration is celebrated, and on September 14th is the Feast of the Cross.

Feasts of the Mother of God

There are 7 feasts of the Virgin: firstly, on March 25th, the Feast of the Annunciation recalls the Incarnation and the redemption of mankind. On August 15th, the Dormition of the Virgin (*shunoyo*) when the twelve Apostles gathered around her death bed.



The Birth of the Virgin is celebrated on September 8th. On December 26th there is the feast of the Glorification of Virgin Mary, the Mother of God at the Lord's Birth; on January 15th there is the feast of the Virgin Mary our Lady of the Sowing; on May 15th the feast of Virgin Mary for the blessing of the Harvest and on June 15th the feast of the

first church built in Yathrib, (today in Saudi Arabia), named after the Virgin.

The feast of the Virgin's belt, Zunoro, is celebrated in Homs on the day of the Dormition of the Virgin on August the 15th.

More descriptions about festivals can be found in English in the Ma'dedono book published by Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel .

There is no Synaxarion in the Syrian Orthodox Church. Local saints are celebrated according to local calendars, for instance in Tur Abdin, or in Northern Iraq.

The feast days of the saints most commonly venerated by the Syrian Orthodox are mentioned in this book in the chapter on spirituality.

10) Sacraments

The sacraments are called mysteries (*roze*) in the Syrian Orthodox tradition. The rite of Baptism (*tekso da'modo*) is similar to that of the Byzantine tradition with readings, admission of the catechumens, renunciation of Satan and confession of faith in Christ. The service in



use is attributed to Severus of Antioch. Two other services once also in use are to be found in old manuscripts; one of these is attributed to Timothy Patriarch of Alexandria. After the blessing of the water, the priest immerses the baby or person for baptism in it, after which he crosses the main parts of the body with myron and the whole body is anointed



(chrismated) and communion is given. A strip of cloth called *klilo* symbolizing a crown is put around the forehead of the child at the end of baptism.

During the marriage service (*tekso*



d'zuwogo) crowns are put over the heads of the bride and groom as in the Byzantine tradition.



Holy unction, or anointing with oil, is given to the sick (*tekso d'qandilo*). The prayer book for the dead is *tekso d'ufoyo d'anide*. For his

funeral service a bishop is carried in a sitting position and will remain so until the burial.

Confession (*mawdyonutho*) is required before taking communion. It is made kneeling, usually on one step of the *qostromo*.



The ordination of the clergy from cantor to patriarch (=9 degrees), is similar to that in other Orthodox traditions, as well as other consecrations.

As in other Orthodox traditions deacons and priests may be married, but bishops are celibate.

There are special prayers for the professions of monks and nuns. There is a prayer of blessing for a deaconess, *m'shamshonitho*, as well as a dedication prayer for the wife of a priest, similar to that of Bath Qyomo or daughter of the Covenant, so that she can assist her husband in some sacraments such as the baptism of women.



11) Comparison with the Byzantine Liturgy and Prayers

The general structure of Syrian Orthodox liturgy and prayers is similar to those of other Orthodox traditions.

Some Greek words were kept in the Syriac prayers like *kyrie eleison*, *sophia*, *proskomen*, *stomen kalos*.

The Greek redaction of the anaphora of Saint James is still celebrated by some Chalcedonian/Eastern Orthodox once a year on his feast day on October the 23rd, especially in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Father Taft said that the Syrian rite is far from being purely Antiochian, but it is the result of a fusion of different traditions. This is obvious, in the case of the anaphoras, for instance the Jerusalem anaphora of St. James has been adapted as the model to which all others have been made to conform. Syro-Antiochian tradition existed both in Greek on the coast line and in Syriac in the hinterland. When churches separated after Chalcedon (451) Greek was abandoned or translated into Syriac and new compositions written in Syriac were added to the treasury. So Syrian Orthodox prayers come partly from Greek, and are partly original Syriac compositions.

He also said that both the anaphora of St John Chrysostom in its present Byzantine Greek redaction and the Syriac anaphora of the Twelve Apostles (I) derive from an earlier, no longer extant, Greek anaphora of the Apostles.

According to Bishop George Khodr of Mount Lebanon the Chalcedonian Orthodox in the provinces of modern Syria and Lebanon used to use Byzantine offices in Syriac totally or partially, depending on the monasteries and villages, at least until the 17th century: as shown by some Synoptic Gospels and some typika of the 17th century with indications for the chanter in Arabic and then the first words of the text of celebration in Syriac. This is confirmed by manuscripts of the time. In Maalula area, near Damascus, psalms were still read in Syriac by Chalcedonian Orthodox until recently, because people still speak an Aramaic dialect there.

Even after the division of Chalcedon, some Greek prayers were accepted in the Syriac rite. The fact is recognised by Bar Hebraeus concerning John of Damascus. His great Resurrection hymn is to be found in the Mosul edition of the Fanqitho (V p.343ff).

Andrew of Crete (d.740), who composed the Great Canon, was a Syrian born in Damascus; many other early Byzantine liturgical poets came from Palestine.

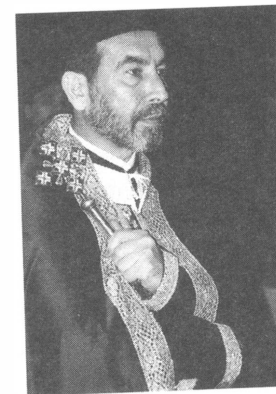
Syriac hymnography made an early and lasting impression on Greek literature. Saint Ephrem's hymns (*madroshe*) were translated during his life-time in the 4th century and probably inspired the Byzantine *kondakia*.

Conclusion

As Father R.Taft said to me, everything remains to be done in Syrian Orthodox liturgical studies and comparative studies. It is hoped that people with a vocation for such studies will soon be found!

S.P. Brock underlined that if one looks at different manuscripts, there is often a certain amount of difference in detail, though the basic structure will be the same. For many Syrian Orthodox services (e.g. Baptism) there are recognized to be two slightly different rites, Antioch (western) and Tikrit (eastern).

In all the Syrian Orthodox liturgical hymns and prayers, theology, including Orthodox christology, is present. One should not forget to study also the spirituality contained in the prayers of the Fathers which are full of poetry, inspired by the Holy Spirit, like Saint Ephrem and his followers. "These prayers, their unique words and music, taste like honey, they come from a very pure spring of christianity, relating the New and Old Testaments", said to me Malfono Isa Gülden of the Monastery of Mar Gabriel.



Monastic Tradition

Before the schism of Chalcedon (451) eremitic and later monastic life was organised in Syria in the hills and mountains around Antioch, in Apamea, in Cyrrhus, in Tur Abdin and in Persia, (today in northern Iraq). Monastic life was especially vigorous in that area from the 6th to the 12th century. We have records of very many monasteries for men and women where Syriac culture was vivacious. Monks contributed to the treasury of intellectual culture by enormous literary activity, copying, producing and translating books, by creating large libraries and centres of learning and by teaching in schools. They also showed hospitality and cared for the poor, sick and needy. They were also evangelists, spiritual fathers, and sometimes martyrs.

In the 4th century Aphrahat writes on asceticism in his *Demonstrations* and he refers to the *bnai* and *bnat qyama*, sons and daughters of the covenant, as dedicated lay men women, virgins and people who may have been married, who lived in virginity and holiness, and to which Saint Ephrem bears witness. By the 4th century, the sons and daughters of the covenant are a body recognized by the Church, committed to an ascetic life, but not yet called monks and nuns. Some were living at home, others in small communities, but not as yet in isolation from the laity.

According to S.P. Brock, virgins, both men and women, and *qaddishe*, or the consecrated, undertook a form of ascetic life which may be called 'proto-monasticism' in Syria and North Mesopotamia.

The Syriac names of the various charismas of the monk, (*deiroyo*), can be: *ihido* (hermit, ascetic), *estunoyo* (stylite), *shmitoyo* (barefoot), *rahoto* (wandering monk or missionary), *turoyo* (mountain-dweller), *madbroyo* (desert dweller), *hbishoyo* (recluse) and *abilo* (mourner).

The archimandrite (*resh dayro*) directed the lives of the monks. The steward or chief of the house (*rab bayto*) managed the economic life of the monastery.

Some ascetics led a solitary life. *Ihido* is the Syriac word for single one or solitary, the equivalent of the Greek *monachos*. In his 20th *Hymn on the Faith* Ephrem describes the ascetic's struggle for single-mindedness.

Aphrahat and Ephrem are the first available sources of the early organized forms of asceticism in the Syriac-speaking world.

This monasticism always had a predilection for anachoretic and austere life, in continuous prayer and fasting, often in uncomfortable places. Saint John Chrysostom (375-81) and Aphrahat the Persian (360-407) lived as hermits on Mount Silpius, (south of Antioch). Other ascetics lived on Mount Skopelos, (north of Antioch). Near Antioch there is a natural grotto where saint Peter is said to have dwelt, and which is still used as a church. Syrian hermits are described by Sozomen in his *Ecclesiastical History* (439-50) and by Theodoret of Cyrrhus.

Towers for recluses, caves for hermits, as well as columns for stylites are known. Stylites, from the Greek word *stylos*, (pillar), were hermits who lived on top of pillars: it was a form of ascetical life which was especially common in Syria, northern Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. The most famous stylite is Saint Symeon (386-459). This 'heavenly man and earthly angel' gave an impetus to monasticism. Everyone, even high ranked, asked for his spiritual advice. He converted and healed many of the pilgrims who came from far away to see him, not only the local Arab tribes, but also people from Armenia, Persia, Egypt, Italy and Gaul, (today France). His life was recorded by his contemporary Theodoret, the bishop of Cyrrhus in the *Historia Religiosa*. After his death the Byzantine Emperor Zeno (+491) ordered the building of a basilica, near the pillar, the remains of which can still be seen north of Aleppo, in Telanissus, the modern Deir Symeon/Sim'an.

Names of other famous stylites are also recorded such as St Daniel of Samosata (d.502), St Symeon the Younger of Edessa (d.c.592), St John of Litharba, near Aleppo (7/8th c.), Thomas near Tella (c.710) and John of Tella. Zacharias was "drawn down" from his column to be ordained bishop of Edessa (ca. 763). Maro the Stylite near Amida foretold the raid of Huns. In Tur Abdin the stylite Mar Habel was famous in the 5th century. When Theodota, the bishop of Amida at the end of the 7th century, retired to the region of Dara, he erected a column. A hermit's pillar survives at the Monastery of Mar Lazarus near Habsenus in Tur Abdin.

From groups of hermits in the 4th century monasteries began, where prayer life and work was organised for communities which were led by a spiritual father.

Before becoming the bishop of Nisibis, Jacob (d.338) lived as a solitary in the mountains. He, with Julian Saba (d. 366-367) who lived in a cave in the desert of Osrhoene, and Abraham of Qidun, were three figureheads for the early Syrian ascetic tradition. Monastic foundations in Osrhoene (c.320) influenced Syrian monastic life in the region of

Antioch: in Gindarus (c.330), in Teleda (c.350), in Mt Amanus (380), and in the region east of Antioch (400s).

Between 317 and 325 Julian Saba (+c.367) founded a monastery in Gullab, 23 km east of Edessa, which was contemporary with the one of Publius near Zeugma (c.350), (today Balkis), on right bank of the Euphrates, in Euphratesia. Around 330 to 337 Asterios, a monk of Gullab, began the monastery of Gindarus, 47 kilometres north east of Antioch, which was the most ancient one in northern Syria in the first quarter of the 4th century (c.330). Other monasteries were then organised by monks of Gullab in the Teleda/Tel'Ade plain (c.350). There the ruins of the monastery of Teleda, founded by Ammanius, can still be seen. This area of the Roman province of Syria I, including Teleda, Mar Bassos and Qenneshrin/Chalkis, remained a centre of Syrian Orthodox monasticism after the schism of Chalcedon, until the 9th century. In 444 disciples of Marcianos, a hermit in the desert of Chalkis, began monastic foundations around Nikertai, 4.5 kilometres north of Apamea (360s), the metropolis of the Roman Syria II: this region remained Chalcedonian after 451.

A Vööbus gives a list of other outstanding monasteries in Mesopotamia, in Tur Abdin and around Amida. In Osrhoene there were many monasteries in and around Edessa itself, and to the south were others such as the famous monastery of Mar Zakkai near Raqqah/Callinicus, and that of Saint Sergius and Bacchus in Resafa. In Euphratesia, north of Samosata and near Melitene/Malatiya, is the area of the monastery of Barsauma which was later to become on several occasions the seat of the Patriarchate. In Phoenicia II, near Homs, there were also many monasteries. In the 6th century, Syrian Orthodox monasteries existed in the province of Arabia, around Damascus.

It is now accepted that monastic movements in Egypt and Syria were parallel phenomena with independent and somewhat different origins in earlier traditions of Christian asceticism and spirituality. The influence of the Egyptian cenobitic monastic tradition, that is of monks living in a community, is felt only towards the end of the 4th century in Syria and North Mesopotamia. In the course of the 5th century the two traditions became fused.

Let us also underline that until the separation of Chalcedon (451) and for some time afterwards, monastic life was common to all Christians around Antioch and Syria. Syrian Orthodox monks and nuns lead the same type of monastic life and take vows as in the other Orthodox churches.

In order to know more about this monastic life, let us quote some famous testimonies.

The spiritual giant Saint Ephrem (+373) was not the founder of a monastery, but a spiritual guide leading souls through his life and writings. He probably lived all his life serving the local community first in Nisibis and later in Edessa. Later tradition, however, portrayed him as a hermit living in a cell in the mountains of Edessa, while keeping contact with the community. His writings greatly inspired not only Syriac monasticism, but monasticism as a whole, even later on Mount Athos and in Russia. His successor Isaac of Antioch (+460?) insists on detachment.

In the early period, monastic dress was a black tunic, or an ample coat (*gulto*) with a kind of hood (*skimo*).

In the region of Antioch, Saint John Chrysostom recounts schedules and life which are based on the same principles as the ones of the following centuries.

Theodoret of Cyrrhus (393-466) was a monk of Nikertai before becoming the bishop of Cyrrhus in 423. His *Religious History, or History of the Monks of Syria*, is the major source for early monasticism in northern Syria in the 4th and 5th centuries. He writes both about anachorites and cenobites, in the regions around Edessa, Cyrrhus and Apamea, for whom the example of the "ancients" (*gerontes*, or spiritual fathers), becomes the norm. His work forms a link between the earliest period of Syrian monastic history and the time of Symeon the Stylite.

As Theodoret wrote in his *History of the Monks*: "I know well that, by transmitting to others the memory of these great men, they will remember me before the God of the Universe".

In the monastery of Zeugma, in the 4th century, Publius gives detailed and strict rules concerning poverty and fasting. Through life in community the monks can help each other to perfection by brotherly correction and by demonstrating zeal, meekness and humility. The monks took care of strangers and poor people in a special house.

In the 5th century Agapetus and Simeon, and their follower Eusebius were the disciples of Marcianos. They lived in a monastery in Nikertai near Apamea. In Marcianos's time (5th century) great freedom was left to groups of hermits living together, but under obedience to the spiritual father they had to follow certain prescriptions, such as: each monk must say the hymns, pray and read the Holy Scriptures.

Twenty years after Elias' *Life of John of Tella*, John of Ephesus (d. 589), who lived in the region of Amida, near Tur Abdin, in the 560s,

gives an outline of the monks' lives. In his *Lives of Eastern Saints* he tells 58 stories of Mesopotamian and Syrian ascetics whom he met during his lifetime, some of whom lived in Egypt and Constantinople. He also mentions nunneries.

In the 7th century the *Life of Theodotos of Amida* is another rich source for monasticism. Theodotos visited Jerusalem, Sinai and Egypt.

In his book of perfection bishop Philoxenus of Mabbug, wrote 13 treatises on monastic life. Bar Hebraeus speaks of monastic life in his *Book of the Dove*.

Syrian Orthodox figures of all times have written about their monastic tradition and history, including in the 20th century: Patriarch Ephrem in his *History of Tur Abdin*, and in his *History of the Monastery of Zafaran*, Patriarch Jacob III on the Monastery of Mar Mattai, Bishop Dolabani on the Monasteries of Mar Gabriel and of Mar Ya'qub Salah, and Metropolitan Paulos Behnam on the Monastery of Mar Barsauma and a pamphlet on the Monastery of St Marc in Jerusalem.

In his *History of the Syriac Sciences and Literature* Patriarch Ephrem I Barsom includes a list of 83 ancient monasteries known in history.

Within a short time laws, perhaps oral at the beginning, were regulating the life of the monastic communities. The most important monastic rules were written by Rabbula of Edessa (+435), John bar Qursos (+538), Jacob of Edessa (+708), Chrystophoros Sargis (+914) of the diocese of Mar Mattai monastery, by John of Mardin (+1165), and by Bar Hebraeus (1225-86). Some rules are known under the name of Ephrem.

When the bishop of Edessa, Rabbula, wrote some admonitions for the monks, he drew up two sets of strict rules, one for cenobites and another for priests and 'sons of the Covenant', speaking of the authority of the superior, of common prayers and of the apostolate.

Canons were written in different monasteries, for example the 24 canons connected with the monastery of Mar Mattai, which date from 508, and others in the Monastery of Mar Zakkai near Callinicum. In the 12th century Michael the Great wrote twelve rules for the monks and John of Mardin wrote seven. A cycle of rules is ascribed to Philoxenus (d.523), bishop of Mabbug.

Syrian Orthodox monasteries were places of culture and education, often with theological schools and great libraries. Charity and spiritual guidance were not absent.

In the writings of Saint Ephrem and Isaac of Antioch there are sentences close to the spirit of the Egyptian *apophthegmata*. The Syriac

Orthodox always had great veneration for the Egyptian desert Fathers whose stories were translated into Syriac in the 5th or 6th century. The

spirituality of Evagrius had a great impact on Syrian Orthodox monastic life. Some Syrian monks are recorded in Egypt as early as the 4th century. In the 8th century Syrian Orthodox benefactors from Tikrit, some living in Cairo, purchased the monastery dedicated to the Virgin in the desert of Scete in Egypt. It became known as Monastery of the Syrians and is so-called today, despite its having been under the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate from the 17th century. It is said that in the 11th century the monastery hosted 60-70 Syrian Orthodox monks.

The very ancient Monastery of St Mark in Jerusalem is still in existence.

There are three new monasteries in Europe: St Ephrem in Losser, Holland; St Jacob in Warburg, Germany; and St Awgin in Arth, Switzerland.

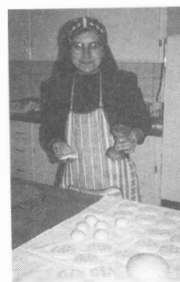
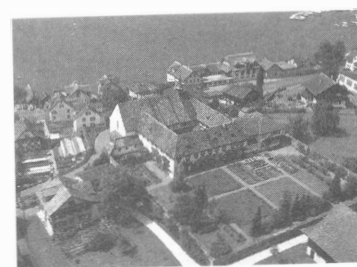
In India there are 4 convents and 2 monasteries.

We shall now look at important monasteries and at monastic life in history and the present time in the areas of Nisibis (situated today in Turkey), Mosul, (situated today in Iraq) and Syria.

Syria

In northern Syria, towards the end of the 6th century, there were at least 80 monasteries around Jabal Sam'an and Jabal Barisha.

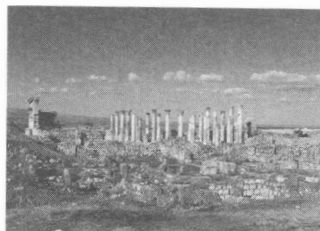
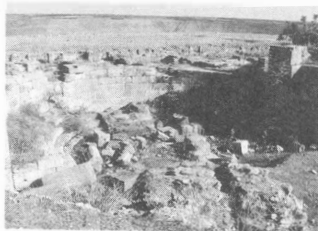
Thirty two kilometres north west of Aleppo, Saint Symeon the Stylite lived for 42 years on



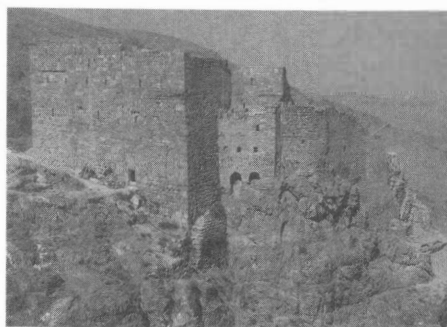


his column. Many pilgrims came there, even from far away, both until his death in 459 and also afterwards.

Near by are the ruins of the Monastery of Teleda, founded in the middle of 4th century, which was an important monastic centre of the Syrian Orthodox until the 10th century. Jacob of Edessa lived there for 9 years. Mar

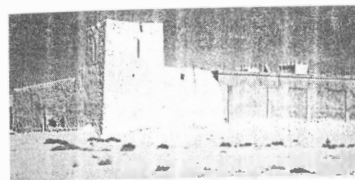


Gregorius of Aleppo registered the land and ruins under the name of



the Syrian Orthodox *wagf* in 1987. There is a project to rebuilt a modern monastery there.

The two Syrian Orthodox monasteries of Mar Eliau in Qaryatain, near Homs, and of Mar Musa al-Habashi, Moses the Black, near Nebek, about 90 kilometres from Damascus, came under Catholic jurisdiction in the middle of the 19th century. Moses the Black



was said to be an Ethiopian prince, and a monk in Palestine before living as a hermit near Nebek. Some caves can still be seen around the monastery which was probably founded in the 6th century. Part of the building dates from the 11th century, with some 11th-12th century wall paintings, the main one representing the history of salvation. It represents the only full programme of medieval church decoration to have survived in greater Syria. The desert road from Hafar, Qaryatain and Sadad was used by pilgrims going to Jerusalem and resting in the monastery.

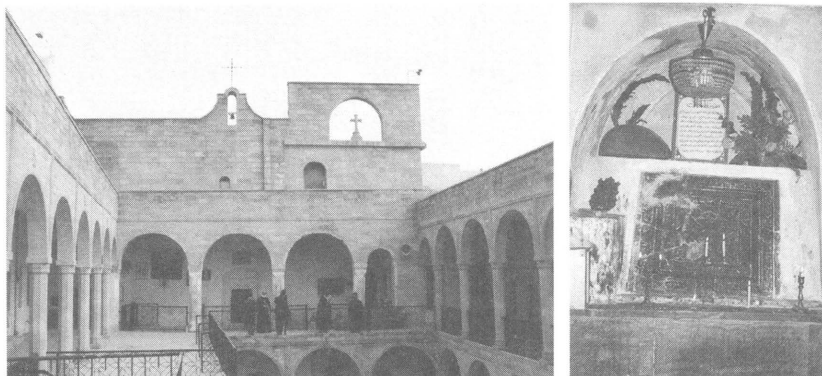
Other Syrian Orthodox monasteries were known in Syria, but they have disappeared. A monastery dedicated to the Virgin in Ifri, 20 km north west of Damascus, is said to have belonged to the Syrian Orthodox.

Iraq

In Iraq, monasticism is attested from the 4th century with the coming of monks from the West, that is from today's eastern Turkey. Because of persecutions (521-65) other monks from Amid fled and settled in the area called Beth Arabaye, west of Mosul.

Ancient Syrian Orthodox monasteries have been listed by Father Fiey, mainly around Mosul. The Jabal Maqlub, about 30 kilometres north east of Mosul, is also called the Mount of the Thousands, because of the





great number of monks and hermits living there when monastic life was very vigorous between the 4th and the 8th centuries. The main monastery there is dedicated to Mar Mattai, Saint Matthew. It is built high on the side of a mountain and was of difficult access before the recent building of a road.

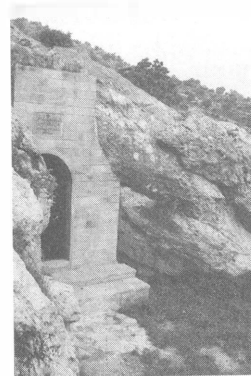
The monastery has an episcopal seat, and, from time to time, it has even become the See of the Maphrian. Maphrian Bar Hebraeus resided there from 1264. He is buried there together with other bishops and with Mar Mattai the founder. Their relics are venerated in a special room (*beth qadishe*) next to the main church. Mar Mattai Monastery is always regarded as a holy place. Even now pilgrims collect soil from the ground as a blessing.

The monastery of Mar Mattai is certainly the oldest Syrian Orthodox monastery in north east Mesopotamia. In 629 the monastery received the primacy over the monasteries of Persia.

It is said that Saint Mattai was born near Amid (Diyarbaker) around the beginning of the 4th century. After the persecution of Julian the Apostate (c.361) he settled on a mountain near Nineveh, (near modern Mosul). He healed the sick. According to tradition, he converted the son of the king of Assyria, Behnam, and his daughter Sarah, to Christianity; consequently Sarah's leprosy disappeared.

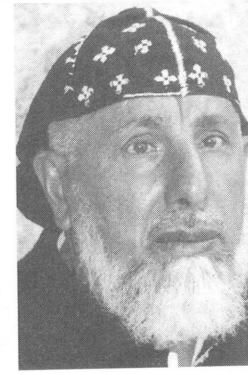
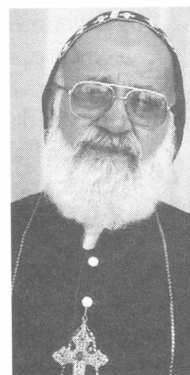
In the present buildings of Mar Mattai monastery some of the lower church walls apparently date back to the 12th/13th century, according to Father Fiey. The main church is dedicated to Mar Mattai and another one is dedicated to the Virgin.

Claudius James Rich, the British consul in Baghdad, visited Mar Mattai in 1820 and was entertained by the archimandrite Matran Musa. In 1843 Rev. G.P. Badger found Mar Mattai monastery



damaged and deserted. In 1892 O.H. Parry found that the repairs noted by Budge some years before were still going on.

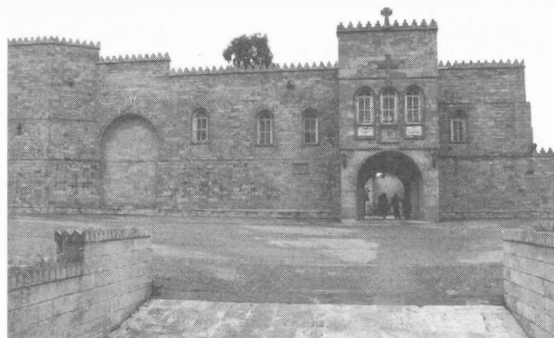
In 1998 there were two elderly monks and the bishop residing in Mar Mattai Monastery.



Near the monastery one can see the cave of Mar Mattai. In other caves around many hermits used to live, the names of whom are remembered, for examples: Zakai, Isaac, Barhebraeus himself, Ibn al-Khiate (the son of the tailor), Ibn al-Sabaghe (the son of the dyer). One place is called 'ruak al malak', that is the passage of the angel.

Near the monastery of Mar Mattai traces are left of ancient monasteries, now destroyed, such as Kukhta, Mar Abraham, Mar Yohannan of Barazi and Mar Yohannan Et Izo Sawra.

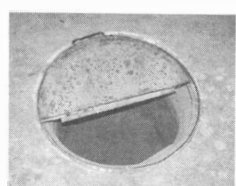
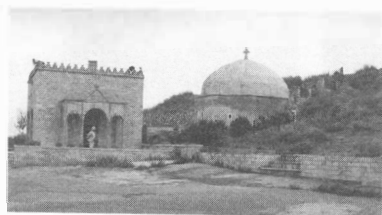
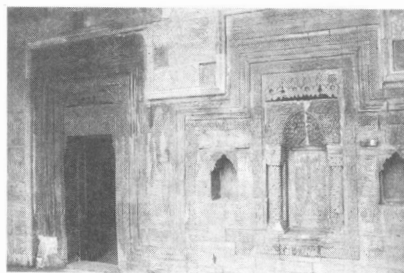
If today the only Syrian Orthodox active monastery in Iraq is Mar Mattai, one should not forget that monastic life used to be very active, and some monasteries used to be great intellectual centres and schools.



In *Mnorto Suryoyto of Antioch*, Patriarch Ephrem Barsom names 31 ancient monasteries in Iraq, today in ruins. We will name some of them.

Near Qarakosh, 35 kilometres south-east of Mosul, in the place where saint

Behnam and Sarah are said to have been martyred, the monastery el Gub, meaning the cistern, was built around the end of the 4th century. In this monastery mainly known as Mar Behnam's, countless



pilgrims come to venerate Saint Behnam the wonder-worker. This monastery belonged to the Syrian Orthodox from the 6th century. Some Syrian Orthodox Maphrians lived here and others were buried here. In 1839 the monastery was taken over by the Syrian Catholics. The church of the Virgin has a unique inner architecture.

The monastery of Mar Daniel, also known as the dung-beetles, was founded around the end of the 4th century and was affiliated to Mar Mattai. The monastery of Mar Zena, established at the end of the 6th century, is situated on the Tigris in a place called today Hamam el Alil, 25 kilometres south east of Mosul. The place is mentioned by Bar Hebraeus in 1210.

The monastery of Mar Sergius, Mar Zaoura and Mar Baouth, in the mountain el Atchan in Sinjar, was built by Mar Ahudemme, the first Maphrian, around 570. Mar Moses bar Kepha studied there.

Mar Ahudemme founded two great monasteries: 'Ain Qenaya, probably near Balad, which was dedicated to Saint Sergius, and Ga'tani near Tikrit.

Maphrian Marutha (d.649) was educated in the monastery of Mar Samuel the Montaineer on the left bank of the Tigris, not far from the town of Balad. Then he studied in Deir Narda, near Dehok, where he became a monk; there Saint Lazarus died as martyr (d.483). It was one of the most famous monasteries in the 6th and 7th centuries and it was well-known for its spiritual fathers, among them Mar Gawsi and Mar Meskena, holy men and wonder-workers during their lives and also after their deaths. After a stay in Mar Zakkai near Callinicum and in cells around Edessa, Mar Marutha settled in Mar Mattai around 605. Around 615 he also took over direction of the monastery near the royal palace in Seleucia-Ctesiphon founded by the queen Shirin. Marutha established several monasteries, among them the monastery of Saint Sergius, Deir el Ajaji/Aingaga, between Tikrit and Hit.

Two kilometres from Qaraqosh is the monastery dedicated to John of Dailam, the founder of the place at the end of the 7th century, whose church has been restored.



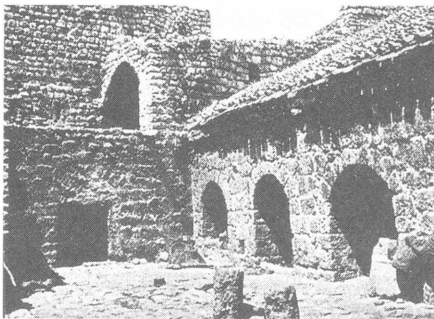
In 1284 Maphrian Bar Hebraeus built a monastery north west of Bartalla dedicated to the martyr John bar Naggare and asked an artist from Constantinople to paint the inside walls of the church. Ancient monasteries are known in Baghdad.

Convents for nuns are also known, such as Mar Daniel quoted before; one ascribed to Queen Hind in the district of al-Hirah (in the 6 c.); Beit Ebre dedicated to the Mother of God built by Marutha; the Convent of the Virgins in Baghdad (10/11th c.) and the convent of Hadida in Qaraqosh mentioned by Bar Hebraeus.

At the moment Iraqi nuns live in the Patriarchate in Damascus.

South East Turkey

According to legendary tradition, Mar Awgen (Eugen) is said to have come from Egypt to Mount Izla, north of Nisibis, where he lived in caves with other hermits. A monastery was founded in his name



towards the end of the 4th century.

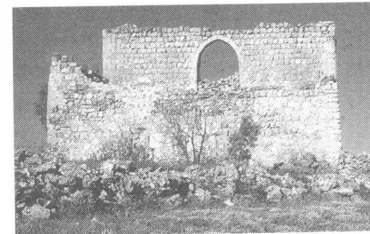
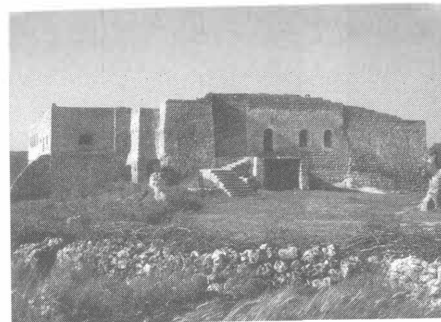
Monastic life developed around Mount Izla and in Tur Abdin which became the most important monastic and spiritual centre of the Syrian Orthodox. Possible translations of Tur Abdin are 'mountain of the servants, or worshippers, [of God]', or also 'mountain of the

hermits'. It is a rocky plateau intersected with valleys.

Mar Barsauma (d.458), meaning the son of fasting, was the abbot of a monastery, between Samosata and Melitene/Malatya, which was, for several periods of time, the seat of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate from the 8th or 9th century until the late 13th century. Michael the Great resided there and was buried there. The monastery was destroyed by Kurds in c.1293. Today this place is probably in the ruins called Barsum-Kalesi.

In the 18th century Niebuhr recorded, from hearsay, 70 monasteries in Tur Abdin, all in ruins. In the 19th century Parry reports 9 monasteries.

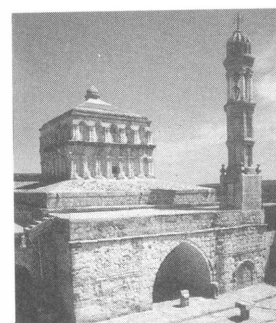
Out of these many ancient monasteries, only four are still functioning today in Tur Abdin. In 1996 in Mar Gabriel Monastery, residence of the bishop Mar Samuel Aktas, there were 3 monks and 13 nuns; in Deir Zafaran 2 monks and 2 nuns; in Mar Ya'qub, ascetic of the 5th century, in Salah, 3 monks and 2 nuns and in Mar Malke, disciple of Mar Awgin, one of the earliest monasteries, 3 monks and 2 nuns.



Other important places are still visible, such as the Monastery of the Cross where

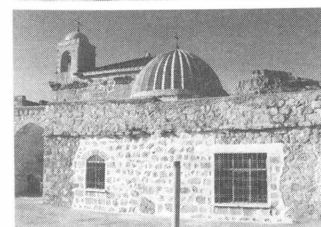
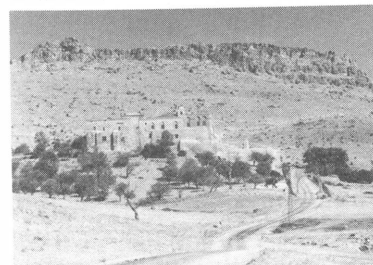
the founder, Mar Aho, is said to have deposited a relic of the True Cross. Mar Abraham; Mar Aho; the monastery of saint Sergius and Bacchus in Hah and about twenty other ruined ones. There were also others which are now completely ruined.

The late bishop Ephrem of Midy (+1983) was a man of prayer and he reorganised monastic life in Tur Abdin. He allowed for reasons of safety, nuns to pray and work



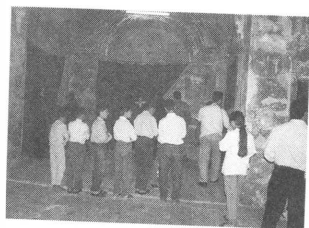
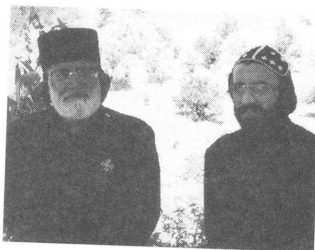
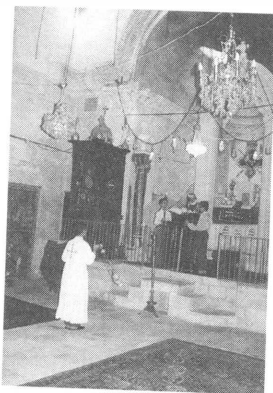
with the monks in the same monastery.

The Monastery of Zafaran, which name refers to the saffron color of the mountain stone, also called Mar Hanania, is situated 6 km from Mardin.



This ancient monastery was the seat of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate from 1293 until 1923. The monastery is surrounded by fertile fields and by cliffs where hermits dwelt.

There are 3 churches: the main one probably dates from the 4th century, and was embellished by Emperor Anastasius (491-518). Two other churches are dedi-



House of the Saints. Couples without children drink water from the well and afterwards start families.



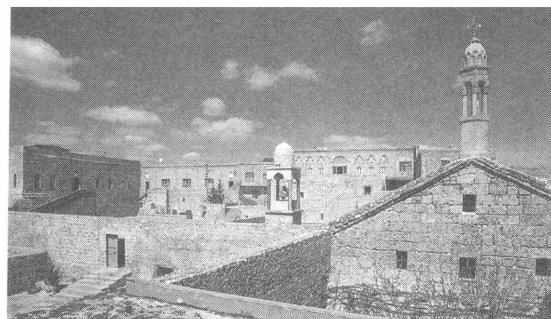
Mother Farida has been a nun in Deir Zafaran for 28 years. She works very hard and she says this is the right way to experience monastic life. She has been ordained as a deaconess and has helped in the baptism of girls. The first thing she would say to make visitors come would be: "Come, because we have the relics of so many saints, come and listen to the miracles they perform. We are sinners but we pray with the saints to God. This was also the place of our Patriarchs since the end of the 13th century and there are so many of our Patriarchs and Bishops buried here. How can we leave these places full of saints and history? We pray to God, our mind is with Him all the time. Whatever happens will happen. All of us will die one day. But, until then, to pray and to serve God is better than any other life".

Father Ibrahim, the abbot of the monastery has been a monk here since 1953. He stays all the time in the monastery, without travelling,

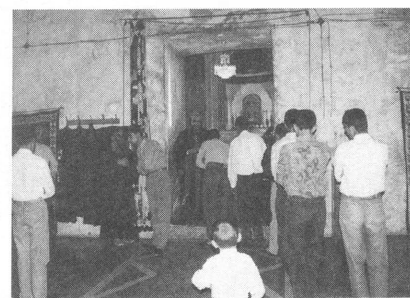
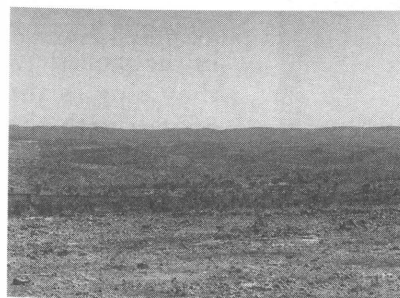
because, he told me, the monk who leaves his monastery is like a fish out of water, he will die.

He also told me about the miracle at the consecration of Patriarch Jacob II (1847-71): the water dried up in the well, so he put some holy oil into the well and water appeared again. In 1953 there was an epidemic in the army, one soldier was cured miraculously in the monastery; many similar cases are known throughout the centuries.

The Monastery of Mar Gabriel, or Qartamin, is the most famous monastic centre in the whole area of Tur Abdin and even of upper

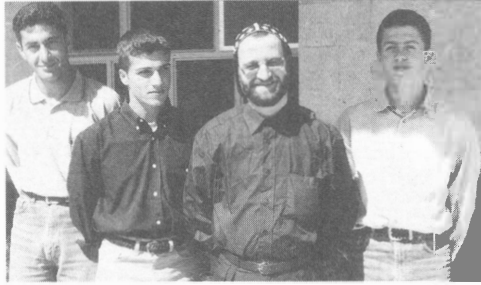


Mesopotamia, most famed as a spiritual, literary and cultural centre. It is very isolated on hills, 13 kilometres from Midyat. The founders of this monastery were Samuel (+ 409) and his disciple



Simeon (d.433) who built the monastery in 397. Later the monastery took the name of a famous abbot, Gabriel (d.668), who was the bishop of Tur Abdin at the time of the Arab Conquest. Their saintly Lives and miracles are recorded. The monastery received donations for buildings from Byzantine emperors such as Honorius (d.423), Arcadius (d.408) in 396/7, from Theodosius II in 409 and from Anastasius. Under him, in the early 6th century (512), the main church was built, later dedicated to saint Gabriel. There antique remains can still be seen with mosaics depicting crosses, trees, flowers, fruit in the sanctuary whose pavement has cross designed patterns. All these emperors' names are commemorated in the *Calendar of Tur Abdin* as well as in the *Book of Life*. The

first bishop to reside in Qartamin was Daniel (614-33). There are three other churches, one of them is dedicated to the Virgin. The prosperity of Qartmin then was due by donations given to Simeon of the Olives who became bishop of Harran in 700.



Pilgrims, sick people and especially childless women, go to the relics of Saint Gabriel and of the other saints. As a blessing, they come and drink water from the cistern which is said to heal. They use the skull of saint John the Arab, a contemporary of Saint Gabriel, as a scoop for the water. Once there was little food, Saint Gabriel blessed it and the food became abundant. He was a man of miracles. In the monastery of the Cross, he made his friend the bishop rise from dead. *The Life of Gabriel* records 800 skulls of holy men found in the Dome of the Egyptians.

Malfono Isa, who teaches Syriac, lives in the monastery with his family. He told me that the monasteries and libraries of Tur Abdin were burnt several times, but the Syrian Orthodox always came back and miraculously continued. In 1930 the Kurds and Turks were fighting,

As in the other monasteries in Tur Abdin, monks and nuns pray together in the church for the canonical hours. They also pray and read in their cells. The nuns take care of the daily necessities of the monastery: food, cleaning, cattle, gardening, sewing and embroidering. In Mar Gabriel they have their headquarters on the left side of the monastery. About 30 young boys live in the monastery, they sing in the offices with the monks and go every day to school in Midyat by minibus.

some Kurds took refuge here and the Turks gave an order to destroy the monastery. The bishop of that time in Midyat, Mar Thomas, ordered the people to fast for three days and nights. Then the good news came that nothing was to be destroyed. So it is believed that Saint Gabriel kept the place. Today this monastery is the most active monastery and it is the heart of Tur Abdin and of many Syrian Orthodox around the world. It is situated in an important corner between Syria and Iraq. During the Gulf War, in 1990, the monastery played an important role: many refugees came from Iraq here and tons of food and medicines were sent to the monastery to be distributed to them.

Sister Febronia has been 14 years in the monastery. She told me:



"The most important thing in our life is spiritual life. Even work becomes spiritual, because I think of God, because working is serving God. Spiritual life is to read the lives of the saints, the history of the Church, to meditate on them, to have spiritual meetings with the sisters and with some of the visitors. But the most important is to pray. Prayer is our relationship to God. When we pray we speak with God. When I read prayers, God speaks with me.

Spiritual fruits come from God's love growing within us, and love for all. At present we prepare ourselves for the real life which is eternal life. If I don't prepare myself for that life, what am I doing with my earthly life? But we are sinners and we ask God, who alone is perfect, to help us. Everyday we must answer for our actions in front of God. Everyday we must pray, repent and cry. The monastic prayer is to pray for the whole world and for peace which is given by God. If you pray with great faith and if you believe that God will help you and others, you can, through prayer, help people. Prayer has great effect".

According to the monk Hanna Aydin, until 1927 there were some very ascetic monks in Tur Abdin, like monk Aho who lived in a cave near Mar Ya'qub (Deirgazall) who had no bed nor shoes, and who ate only once a day, in the evening, and only uncooked food. Three other monks in Mar Sherbil by Midyat lived likewise, Yohanna Miksi Bahhe, Yohanna Vedike and Barsom. In Mar Abraham by Midyat three more monks, Circo, Malke and Yohanna, wore an iron belts and walked barefoot, and so did two monks of Mar Hobil. Before World War I there were more than twenty monks living in such an ascetic way. Some also lived in villages and copied liturgical books.

Conclusion

When I asked Patriarch Zakka about monastic life, he told me: "Monastic life is the strength behind the Church. Nowadays there is a renewal of monastic life in our Church. We have well educated young women and men who enter monastic life. We find that Saint Ephrem was not only living in a cave as a hermit, but he was teaching the young ladies of the Church as well. So our monastic life is not only to live alone and to worship God, but also to teach the people. When you want to renew monastic life, this is the method. In the world of today monks and nuns should live with the people in order to share spiritual things with the people who don't have time to go to the monastery. So some monks and nuns will go to them to share in the prayer life of the parish, to visit the families and they will be like missionaries. Throughout the ages our monks preached the Gospel and were missionaries. Today even some nuns, and not only monks, should have such role in the Church. This is the witness of spiritual life. We believe that monastic life started through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and that today the renewal of monastic life should be by the Holy Spirit, and not only by canons. The Holy Spirit has His message to us today. In the past, during Lent and the Holy Week, our monks used to come and preach in the parishes. Beside every church we used to have a school. Our monasteries used to be colleges where faith, history and Syriac language were taught.



Concerning nuns I think that it is very necessary that they do something for the Church, not only by praying and working in the convents, by living the three monastic vows, but also by teaching, especially the young people. This "new" monastic life of nuns will help for the general renewal of spiritual life in our Church. Now we have a new convent with 8 nuns in the Patriarchate. Some also live in Atshaneh near Beirut in the convent of Saint Jacob Baradeus who was a preacher, and we have to follow his example. For instance, in summer 1996, together with some professors, the nuns gave a course of theological studies in the convent of Atshaneh. The subjects were Church history, theology, Syriac language and how to lead a Christian life. It is their spiritual responsibility to spread the Gospel, to live it, to be good examples and to reflect spiritual life. I gave the nuns that role to

teach and to be good examples for others in the spiritual life: our people accept them as spiritual women and are proud of them. Nuns who live and pray in the convents, and who are inspired by the Holy Spirit, can also be teachers and preachers, in another way, for the visitors. Perhaps all this will be developed in the future. Perhaps the coming age will require other means to share spiritual life with the lay people and to answer new needs to help people for their salvation".

This emphasis on celibacy and service to the Church is widely found in Syriac Christianity before the growth of a separate ascetic movement, as experienced by the sons and daughters of the Covenant in the third century. Patriarch Zakka also referred to the deaconesses in the Syrian Orthodox tradition. There is a specific ancient prayer to bless them. Today the role of the "deaconesses" is not as in the past: they serve in the local churches, as lay women, at specific times, and teach in Sunday schools; they sing in the choir and sometimes they help people for specific needs. They live in their families, they can marry. They come voluntarily to serve the church in a flexible way, not completely dedicated like the nuns. The deaconesses also sometimes share the life of the nuns.

Ancient monasteries are known in many other places than the ones described here. Archeological digs would help to re-discover these historical places. Monasteries have always played an important role in the spiritual and cultural life. It is hoped they will continue to do so.

This chapter will be continued when speaking of spirituality and of spiritual fathers.

Syriac Spirituality

1) Short introduction

Christian spirituality is concerned with monasticism, asceticism, liturgy and prayer, as well as everyday life. It aims to help all people become aware of the Kingdom of God, to think of death and salvation, to experience love, forgiveness and peace of mind. Here it is only possible to give a glimpse which will enable the reader to begin to understand the richness of the Syriac tradition, which is an important part of Christian spirituality.



As S.P. Brock writes in *Spirituality in the Syriac tradition*: earliest Syriac spirituality, especially before A.D. 400, is expressed in Semitic thought forms which have not yet undergone strong influence from Greek culture and thought patterns, with the *Odes of Solomon* (late 2nd c.), the *Acts of Thomas* (3rd c.), Aphrahat, the *Book of the Steps*, and saint Ephrem (4th c.). The major themes of this earliest period are: the descent of Christ into Hell, the recovery of Paradise, Christ as the Heavenly Bridegroom, salvation as healing, the inner or luminous eye of faith, and purity from sin which can perceive the harmony restored by Christ. Other themes such as divine love, self-emptying and humility, inner virginity, the offering of prayer, also occur.

Saints, monks, nuns and martyrs, follow biblical models of asceticism as seen in the lives of Elijah, Elisha, St. John the Baptist and St. Paul, who, in singleness of mind, all followed a life of renunciation for God.

What are some of the characteristics of ascetic life in Syria and Mesopotamia? In monastic and eremitical life a particularly severe asceticism led not only to prayer without ceasing, but also to outward manifestations such as living in remote places, eating and drinking hardly anything, or just wild grasses (herbivores). Some lived in trees (dendrites), some wore iron chains, some shared their lives with wild

animals and some, like Symeon the Stylite (d.459), even lived on top of tall pillars (stylites).

From the beginning of monasticism, the monks had great influence on people who asked for their intercessory prayers and blessings. Traditionally monks gave spiritual guidance, and, in certain cases, were even able to cure the sick. The ascetic was often at the same time a theologian and a poet.

The goal of the Christian life, the purification of soul and body can be achieved through asceticism, and love: even the weakest human being can achieve holiness. Some lay people, including women, are also known to lead an ascetic life of constant prayer, chastity, while at the same time doing acts of charity for the poor, advising and exhorting. In their book, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, S.P. Brock and S. Harvey translated their biographies in which the reader can learn of women whose sublime way of life cannot be adequately be described in words. They quote John of Ephesus (560s) who speaks of the devout old Mary who did her religious service in Amida and who lived in abstinence, fasting, vigils, constant prayers, and charity. One day she decided to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Standing in front of the site of Golgotha, she was lifted up in ecstasy. She remained there for three days and three nights. Then, for three years, she went about praying, sometimes in tears, without speaking and spending the night in the church. She also sat amongst the poor. Some people even thought that she was mad or senile. Being recognised she fled. Then miracles occurred "by her presence, and not by her will or her word". If anyone tried to pressurise her, he would never see her again. She was very much on guard against pride and she fought against vain glory.

Mary's younger sister, Euphemia, who was a widow with a daughter, turned to the inner world. They wove wool, as she would not eat bread which had not been bought by the work of her own hands. She gave half of her little sustenance for the relief of the poor, widows, orphans, the sick and those in prison. She visited them, summer and winter, walking in mud, snow and ice, without any shoes. She also would gather them into her house. If some rich people refused to share with the needy, she would make them regret it. The poor used to call her "our consolation". There are many other Syrian Orthodox women whose asceticism and prayer could be similarly related.

Some of their acts, between sanctity and folly, made some ascetics known as "holy fools" or "fools for Christ". The exploits of Simeon the Fool of Homs were described by Leontios of Neapolis.

2) Spiritual Authors

We cannot name here all the spiritual authors of the Syrian Orthodox tradition, but some famous ones are the following.

Saint Ephrem is called *kenoro*, harp of the Holy Spirit. Ephrem means fruit-bearing. He probably remained a deacon all his life. He is well known for his hymns on christology, virginity, compunction, faith, monastic life, priesthood and Christian life in general. Jacob of Serugh calls him the crown of all Syriac people. Saint Ephrem's work can be summarized by the two following themes: God as mystery and the call to become like God, or "divinisation".

In his *Demonstrations* Aphrahat speaks, among other things, of consecrated and spiritual life.

John of Apamea, or John the Solitary (5th c.), wrote for ascetic communities on the subject of inner prayer. He based his theology and spirituality on the themes of hope, of the future resurrection and on the implications of baptism and the sacraments which nourish the spiritual life. He identifies two stages of prayer, vocal and silent. He represents the "Greek" influence in the Syrian eremitic tradition, though he himself wrote in Syriac and maintained an authentic Syriac ascetic spirituality.

Philoxenus (+523), bishop of Mabbug in North Syria in 485, did not only write theological works, but also spiritual ones, such as the *Thirteen Discourses on the ascetic Life*, the *Discourse on the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit*, various works on the subject of prayer, and others in the form of letters. His homilies are concerned with observing the commandments, following Christ's perfection and teaching 'how to begin to become the disciple of Christ; by which rules and conducts one is moulded to attain spiritual love'.

We find a mystical dimension in the verse homilies (*memre*) by Jacob of Serugh (521), as well as in the homily on the Veil of Moses. His letters also speak of inner life.

Some *Lives* have spiritual impact, like that of John of Tella and of Mar Ahudemme, both of the 6th century.

Much later, the Maphrian Bar Hebraeus left two spiritual manuals written towards the end of his life (1286): a codification for the lay and monastic Christian life in his *Book of Ethics* indicating spiritual and corporal exercises, and a spiritual guide for monks and recluses in the *Book of the Dove*.

In the 15th century, Mas'ud of Salah in Tur Abdin wrote a mystical and monastic book, the *Spiritual Boat*.

Other great spiritual figures are named in Patriarch Ephrem Barsom's *History of the Syriac sciences and literature*, such as Maphrian Basilius Simon, John of Eftounia, Daniel of Salah (6th c.), Athanasius Abu Ghalib, the ascetic Isaie, Mar Barsauma, Eshaia of Aleppo (5th c) and Rabbula Bishop of Edessa.

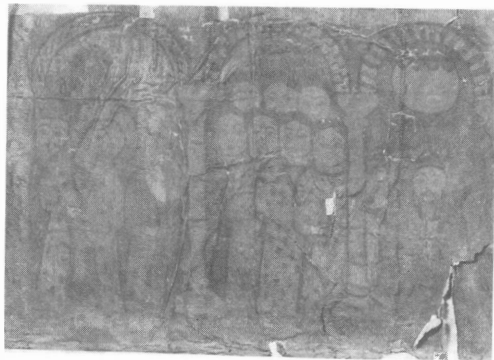
3) Saints

In his *History of the Syriac Literature* Patriarch Ephrem Barsom gives the following references concerning the saints venerated by the Syrian Orthodox. In the *Book of Life*, or diptychs, one can find the names of prophets, apostles, disciples, Fathers, saints, martyrs, mystics, Patriarchs, bishops and other clergy, monks, nuns and devout lay believers. The *Calendar of Edessa*, written in 411, also gives the names and the feasts of the saints and martyrs. From the 6th century there is a calendar associated with the Monastery of Qenneshre. In the 7th century Mar Jacob of Edessa wrote a general calendar for the whole year which was used for a long time, but in which local saints are not named. In the 11th century Saïd bar Sabouni added to it the names of some mystics and prelates. In the 14th century a monk from Hah, Saliba bar Khairoun, added many more names of bishops, monks, mystics, saints and Fathers from Tur Abdin. F. Nau has published, in French, translations of these calendars.

In the diptychs of the anaphora of St James the following names are commemorated: James the first bishop of Jerusalem, the apostles, martyrs and saints Ignatius, Clement, Dionysios, Athanasius, Julius, Basil, Gregory, Dioscorus, Timothy, Philoxenus, Antemus, Ivanius, and, particularly, St. Cyril "that exalted and firm tower who declared and made manifest the Incarnation of the Word God, our Lord Jesus Christ who took Flesh". Patriarch Severus, the "crown" of the Syrian Orthodox, is remembered, as well as St. Jacob Baradaeus, St. Ephrem, St. Jacob, St. Isaac, St. Balai, St. Barsauma, head of the anchorites, St. Symon the Sylite and St. Abhai the chosen.

Many saints of the 5th and 6th centuries are recorded in the *Histories of the Lives of the blessed Orientals* by John of Ephesus, himself a monk of the monastery of Mar Yuhanna in Amida.

There are many other Syrian Orthodox saints. In *The Golden Key to Divine Worship* written in 1929, Patriarch Ephrem mentions the following saints in a short calendar: Basil and Gregory (January 1), the beheading of John the Baptist (January 7), St. Stephen (January 8), St. Symon the Elder (February 2), the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (March 9),

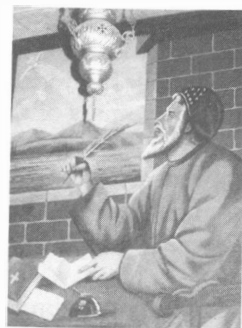


St George (April 23), the Apostles Peter and Paul (June 29), the Apostle Thomas (July 3), Mar Kyriakos and his mother Julitta (July 15), Mar Behnam, his sister Sarah and the Forty Martyrs (December 10), the Slaughter of the Innocents (December 27).

He also observes: "The Day of the Forty Martyrs, falling as it does in Great Lent, is changed to the Saturday nearest to March 9-14, unless it falls on Saturday, Sunday or Wednesday in the middle of Lent; feasts that fall irregularly, such as Shmuni, called the mother of the Maccabees and her 7 martyred sons, on October 15th in Mosul and on July 31st and May 8th in Mardin; the feast of Mar Barsauma on the Thursday just before Pentecost is really in memory of St. Barsauma bishop

of Kfar Tuta, martyr, but nowadays we dedicate it to Mar Barsauma chief of the Ascetics".

He notes the names of saints feasted locally: Mar Ahudemh the first Maphrian (August 2), Mar Matthew the Ascetic (September 18), observed in the Mosul Church; Mar Daniel (October 20) in Bartalla and around Mosul; Mar Michael the Ascetic (May 1); Mar Osio and Mar Isaiah of Aleppo (November 15) in Mardin; Mar Kowmeh in the Church of Diarbaker; Mar Ahron in Kharput; Mar Malke (September 1), monk disciple of Awgin in Tur Abdin; Mar Philoxenus (August 18), in Midyat; Mar



Julian/Elian and Mar Moses the Ethiopian (September 18), in Syria and Jerusalem. The Mosul Church holds a day in memory of Mar Ignatius Nuroño on the Thursday following the Fast of Nineveh, however this is of recent origin.

Some of these saints, who lived before the separation of Chalcedon (451), and some others, can be celebrated together with the Chalcedonian Churches. There are, for example, Prophet Elijah (July 20), John the Baptist (January 7), Addai, first evangelist of Edessa, and Abhai (both on October 1); bishop Jacob of Nisibis (January 13/May 11 in 1997 Calendar); ascetics such as Anthony of Egypt (January 17). There are also the martyrs: Ignatius of Antioch (December 20/January 29?), Barbara and Juliana, early 4th century (December 4); all the Persian martyrs before 451, such as Jacob the Intercisus whose limbs were cut and who was a martyr under the Persian king Sapor I (November 27); Shirin and Christina (March 13); Febronia (June 24); Sergius and Bacchus (October 7). The martyrdom of Saint Sergius in Sergiopolis/Resafa was an important pilgrimage centre where many Christian Bedouins came: for instance, the Taghlib tribe, in the region of Nisibis, Sinjar and near Tikrit, claimed Sergius as patron.

The feasts of King Agbar and of St. Ephrem change according to Lent. St. Agbar is feasted on the day of the raising of the Cross, on Wednesday in the middle of Lent. St. Ephrem is commemorated on the first Saturday of the Great Fast, together with saint Theodore, martyr, who like St. George is represented as a horseman killing a dragon. Symon the Stylite, who died in 469 (September 2), is considered by the Syrian Orthodox to be one of their saints. He is mentioned in the poems of Jacob of Serugh.

Some other famous saints celebrated by the Syrian Orthodox include a number of Patriarchs, Bishops and others, including (according to the 1997 Calendar): Awgin (Eugen) (April 20), an Egyptian monk who is said to have founded monasticism around Nisibis in the 4th century; Aho (May 5), who founded a monastery in Tur Abdin in the 6th century; Severus, Patriarch of Antioch (February 20); Jacob Baradaeus (July 31), who reorganised the Syrian Orthodox Church in the 6th century; Ahudemh the first Maphrian (September 18) and Marutha (March 10); Gabriel (August 31), abbot of the monastery in Tur Abdin and bishop in the 7th century; Simeon of the Olives of Mar Gabriel (8th century) is commemorated on June 1st; Jacob of Serugh (November 29); and Sarah and her brother bishop Zena, martyrs (November 22).

4) Martyrs

Martyrdom really means to witness to Christ without compromise, not to deny one's faith, even on pain of death. In the Syrian Orthodox tradition there are many who died as martyrs. Pagan Romans tortured and killed Christians under the reigns of Nero, Trajan (98-117), Hadrian (117-138), and especially under Decius (250-251) and Diocletian (303-305), in Edessa and the surrounding region. During the Zoroastrian Persian Sasanid Empire, Syriac Christians were persecuted, especially under Shapur II (339-379), Yazdgard I and Bahram V (420-422) and Yazdgard II (446-448), until the 7th century, and in the following centuries. Many Christians were killed in the region of Arbela/Irbil and Adiabene, but also in the Persian Gulf and in the south of the Arabian Peninsula, in Najran (today in Saudi Arabia), as related in the *Acts of the Martyrs* in the middle of the 5th century and in the 6th century.

The names of some martyrs are better known than others. Saint Behnam, for example, was martyred on the site of the monastery that bears his name, situated south Mosul. But one should not forget all those who likewise gave their lives to remain Christian. In the time of emperor Diocletian Febronia was a nun living near Nisibis who died as a martyr. Her abbess wrote: "I have written down this martyrdom to the praise and glory of the glorious woman, and for the salvation and encouragement of those who hear it, in the hopes that their minds may be awakened at this contest for the faith, and that they too may be held worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven in Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belong the glory and the power, for ever and ever, amen".

In the most difficult situations Syrian Orthodox have always remained faithful to Christ and they still do. Some martyrs of the early 20th century are recalled in Nu'man Aydin, *Gedshe u Shabte d-Turabdin* (Bloodshed), published in St Ephrem Monastery, Holland, in 1997.

5) Relics and pilgrimage places

Relics of the saints and martyrs mentioned above were kept in their burial places, but also in the seats of the Patriarchate, in the principal monasteries and in some churches. Rule twelve of Rabbula says that the bones of the martyrs are to be put in martyria so as to be honoured. In ancient Edessa, the following relics were venerated: those of Addai, of the physician-martyrs Cosmas and Damian, of saint Ephrem, and even of the apostle Saint Thomas. Also venerated was a letter said to have been written by Christ to king Abgar and his portrait or *mandylion*. No

Syrian Orthodox church is left in Edessa, (today in Turkey). St Sergius and Bacchus were buried in Sergiopolis/Resafa; between 514-18 some of their relics are said to have been brought to Constantinople. Saint Jacob of Serugh was buried in the church of the Virgin in Diarbaker. According to his will Saint Ephrem was buried in the cemetery of the foreigners in Edessa.

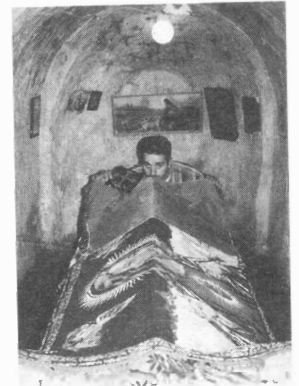
The relics were venerated by many pilgrims and oil was collected from diverse martyria. Today most of the former places of pilgrimage, such as the pillar of St Symeon the Stylite, Tel' Ade, Mar Zakkai in Raqqah/Callinicum in Syria, Mar Awgin Monastery in Turkey and Mar Daniel Monastery in Iraq, are in ruins. The most well-known places of pilgrimage where relics are still to be found are the Monastery of St Mark in Jerusalem, the monasteries of Zafaran and Mar Gabriel in Tur Abdin, the monasteries of Mar Moses the Ethiopian and Mar Elian in Syria (now Catholic), and the monastery of Mar Mattai in Iraq. Relics are still kept in village churches, such Mar Dodo in Basebrin, near Mar Gabriel Monastery in Tur Abdin.

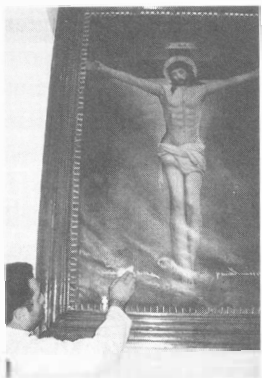
Some relics of Saint Thomas are kept in Mosul and in India. The relics of Saint Jacob of Nisibis are still venerated in the Syrian Orthodox church of his name in Nuseybin, Turkey. The buried belt of the Virgin, found in 1953, is said to date from the Roman period and is venerated in the Syrian Orthodox cathedral dedicated to the Virgin in Homs.

Miraculous healing powers may come directly or indirectly from the bodies or relics of the martyrs and of the saints which are venerated by pilgrims. Saint Ephrem declared that the sanctity of the relics of Saint Jacob, kept in his town of Nisibis, protected it against the onslaught of the Persians.

The faithful pray for the intercession of a certain saint for specific problems: for instance, Mar Mattai and Mar Gabriel heal sickness and sterility, Mar Dodo of Isfis and Mar Zakkai of Callinicum insanity. In Tur Abdin Christians and Muslims go to the monastery of Mar Malke, the disciple of Mar Awgin, to be cured from epilepsy and insanity.

Wonderful things may also happen through prayer and icons, as manifestations of divine grace, even in the present period. In 1967 oil flowed from a lamp in the church of Mar Dimet in Zaz in Tur Abdin.





In 1996 oil flowed from a picture of Christ in the cathedral in Aleppo. In 1966 a priest saw a light from the ruins of the church of Mar Ya'qub in Tur Abdin and relics were found in the wall.

6) Prayer of the heart

In Eastern Orthodox milieux the prayer of the heart is understood as the repetition of the name of Christ (Jesus prayer). It seems that there is nothing quite similar in the Syriac tradition, although short repeated invocations are found, but not always with the name of Jesus.

For instance, John the Solitary of Apamea advises the repetition of 'Abba' and 'My God, grant me wisdom and strengthen me'. The prayer of the heart is understood rather as the remembrance of God and the loving constant and total awareness of his presence which leads to transfiguration. For Aphrahat and Ephrem the heart is where prayer should take place. In the Syriac understanding, as in the Bible, the heart is the spiritual centre of the person. As Aphrahat says, the precondition for 'pure prayer' is 'purity of heart'. A 'luminous heart' permits to see things with a 'luminous eye', which is the term repeated many times by Saint Ephrem. John of Apamea expresses in similar terms. Saint Ephrem advices to pour tears in prayer, to purify the body from guilt.

7) Conclusion

Monk George Boutros Gharzani has studied theology in Athens. He told me: "Our Fathers such as Saints Jacob of Serugh, Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus and Moses bar Kephla, knew the Greek Fathers and quoted them. According to Saint Ephrem every Christian must lead a spiritual life, not only monks. Spirituality and life must be one. On Thursday evening, in our prayer book called *Shehimo*, a *bo'utho*, or supplication attributed to saint Ephrem, instructs the people how to behave in the Church and how to pray. When we pray, we must think of God and of nothing else. Even our Fathers were only students in the school of God; they were alive through the Holy



Spirit. Bar Hebraeus speaks of steps without end leading to the perfection of Christ. Philoxenus of Mabbug wrote a large book for monks about the way to be perfect, through much prayer. One must be rich in spirituality and faith. Grace is given by God. So we have to be humble, to respect and love each other. Syriac spirituality is close to the Gospel, to the words of Christ; all writings in Syriac are inspired by the spirit of the Gospel. We must accept what Christ wants to tell us, what He is teaching us: if we really do what He tells us, we have no need of anything else. Christian life is very simple, easy. Many people don't understand it. But everyone can reach this teaching of Christ's. We must not only teach the commandments of Christ, but we must live by them in daily life. The meaning of prayer is how to live and act with everyone, not only to pray in the church. Fasting is not only not eating, it is remembering to repent. If we live Christian life, it is easy; if we speak about it, it is hard".

Bishop Matta of Hasakah said to me: "The Syrian Orthodox spirituality is very rich. It is all inspired by the Holy Bible and by our Fathers. We live this spirituality in our liturgy and in our daily prayers. Our spirituality contains the doctrine of our Church. This spirituality is our identity, our unique heritage which we are proud of. It is not easy to maintain. There are many things that can take the mind away from the Church, from the faith. But there is work to be done to help our communities concentrate on their spiritual heritage, so that they can preserve themselves as the spiritual Body of Christ".

In conclusion I hope that many people will read the Syrian Orthodox Fathers, as well as Syrian Orthodox liturgical works, and that they will discover and be nourished by their deep spirituality. Certain Syriac mystical writings, as John the Solitary (8th c.), and hagiographical ones, affected Byzantine spirituality.

Contemporary Spiritual Figures

Patriarchs Elias III, Ephrem I, Jacob III and the present Patriarch Severus Zakka I, as well as Bishops Dolabani and Gregorius Paulus Behnam, are some of the figures who revived not only the organisation but also the cultural and spiritual life of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the 20th century. The memory and presence of these Fathers inspire the Syrian Orthodox Church. As a matter of fact all the contemporary bishops, many priests and lay people remember the spiritual teaching they received from these great personalities who deeply influenced their lives. Some wrote articles and books, mostly in Arabic, about these figures who perpetuated the Syriac patrimony through their many writings and through their lives. Their lives and teachings ought to be better known by other Christians.

1) Bishop Philoxenus Yohanna Dolabani

Bishop Philoxenus Yohanna Dolabani (1885-1969) was the last bishop of Mardin from 1947 to his death in 1969. In 1908 he became a monk in Deir Zafaran. He was a great scholar and wrote more than 70 books. He made translations from Syriac to Arabic and Turkish. Bishop Dolabani was the first to translate the Syrian Orthodox liturgy into Turkish for the people who moved to Istanbul, because they know longer understood Syriac. He printed his books and many others in the monastery, as well as a periodical called *al-Hikmat (Sophia)*. His scholarly work was recognised and respected by all, as well as his good deeds. He used to ask the people: "What good things have you done? Don't tell lies, try to say only good things, think of God". He loved and helped poor people.

He is buried in Deir Zafaran. The week before he died, when he saw his last article in the Patriarchal Magazine, he said: "I don't like death to break my pen, because the Church and our youth still needs my pen, but may God's will be done".

Metropolitan Cicek lived with him for three years in Mardin and he remembers: "He was such a spiritual loving man, always praying. It was

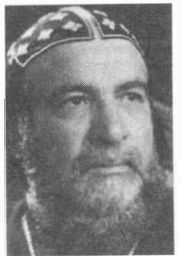


enough to see him, to be with him, to live with him. We were living and praying together. He was a man of God, a living example, which is better than words and long talks. I tell people about his life and influence. Metropolitan Gregorius Yohanna of Aleppo is preparing a book entitled "Dolabani, the Ascetic of Mardin". He remembers that bishop Dolabani used to sit every day with the visitors, explaining the Gospel, telling stories of the Church Fathers, singing Church songs, in order to avoid gossiping. Father Ibrahim of Zafaran monastery remembers that bishop Dolabani lived as a monk, with very little money. He loved the people and used to teach humility by his life. He did not care for food or clothes. When he was very sick at the time of his death, special food was cooked for him. He asked if the boys living in the monastery were eating the same food. At the negative answer, he ordered that his food should be taken to the boys and that the boys' food should be brought to him. Malfono Isa Gülcan residing in the monastery of Mar Gabriel remembers what bishop Dolabani told him before going to the military service: "You should not forget to pray. God wants spiritual prayer from your heart. You can always pray in your heart. When you do or say anything good, that is prayer. Christ said to pray all the time. You cannot say prayers all the time, but you can pray all the time by doing good things in your shop, in your work, in your military service. Your life becomes prayer when you think, do and say good things".

Dolabani was a missionary-minded man. After the end of the persecution of the Armenian and Syrian Orthodox in 1914, he was always ordaining priests, monks and deacons, and sending them to very remote areas as far as Bitlis and Van where the faithful had lost their clergy and forgotten about Christianity. Dressed as lay people, they baptised so many Syrian Orthodox people and also Armenians who had no more clergy. S.P. Brock said to me: "I met Bishop Philoxenus Dolabani once, a few years before he died, and he has always greatly impressed me, both as a man of great holiness and as a tireless scholar in the service of the Syrian Orthodox Church".

2) Bishop Gregorius Paulos Behnam

Bishop Gregorius Paulos Behnam (1916-69) was born in Qaraqosh, near Mosul in Iraq, into a family where by tradition the eldest son of priest always became a priest. From childhood he liked solitude and wanted to consecrate his life to the Church and study.



When he was twelve he asked to be brought to the minor seminary of the monastery of Mar Mattai founded in 1923 and closed in 1934. There Patriarch Ephrem noticed him and took him to Homs in Syria for one year to study Arabic and philosophy. Then he sent him to Mar Ephrem seminary in Zahlah in 1939 to teach Syriac, and later he appointed him as its head. When the seminary was moved to Mosul in 1945, Paulos Behnam was appointed again as rector and he also taught Syriac language and literature, Church history, exegesis, homiletics, philosophy and canon law. He began to write a *Syriac Encyclopedia*. He advised the students to be spiritual, humble, and not to care for the body but only for the soul. He founded a review called *al Mashriq*, later called *Lisan al-mashriq (The Language of the East)* which circulated from 1945 to 1951, in which he wrote many articles, to teach the Syriac patrimony to the younger generations. He organised spiritual and cultural meetings for the youth. In 1952 he was ordained Archbishop of Mosul and Patriarch Ephrem Barsom gave him the name Gregorius, in memory of Bar Hebraeus. In 1959-60 he spent one year at the Union Theological Seminary in New York. Then he was transferred to Jerusalem until 1962, when people asked him to be the bishop of Baghdad and Basra until his death on February 19th 1969. He took part in the Pan-Orthodox Conference in Rhodes in 1961.

He used to write for many hours every day and night. A great poet, he also wrote theological and catechetical books, plays, philosophy and linguistics, and he made several translations.

Father Thoma Sofia, his brother-in-law, remembers that when bishop Behnam visited families they used to give him some money; then, when he went to the houses of the poor, he would give them the money in a discrete way, by hiding it in the house. He explained to Father Thoma that if he was hungry he, as bishop, could go anywhere to be given food, but that it was difficult for the poor to do the same. His life was very simple. He forgave everyone. In Iraq he helped many orphans. After his death some said: "It is now that we really become orphans, because he took good care of us from our childhood". He said that mothers are like schools who educate society. Once he said: "We must walk in the steps marked out for us by God". As a young student he became very ill and Patriarch Barsom paid for all the treatment; when the Patriarch was thanked by the father for it, he answered that it was nothing, because Paulos Behnam was a treasure for the Syrian Orthodox Church and was worth more than any amount of gold.

The present bishop of Beirut, Ephrem, wrote a poem about Bishop

Gregorius Paulos Behnam. He remembers him as an outstanding speaker and preacher, a poet and a good Christian example; he was so loyal to his Church, he loved the rituals and tradition of his Church. He made his students feel that they were his friends.

Bishop George Saliba of Beirut remembers that bishop Behnam used to tell the students to keep their faith and knowledge, because if they did not keep their tradition and if they were not well educated, they would not be faithful believers wherever they went.

Both Bishop Isaac Sakka and Father Youssif Said wrote books about Archbishop Behnam. There are about 10 published books by Bishop Paulos Behnam and others unpublished.

3) Patriarch Elias III

Patriarch Elias III (1917-32) was born in Mardin, and he became a monk in Deir Zafaran. Due to his strong character he was able to withstand the massacres in Turkey and by his wisdom he kept the Church alive; he protected and advised his people. He was the first one to take care of the Syrian Orthodox orphans and needy people in 1895 after the first massacres, and he did the same in Mosul after the second massacres, serving food to them himself.



An extraordinary Synod took place in the monastery of Mar Mattai in 1930 with many items concerning the spirituality of the Church life of that time which he wanted to apply. One of his priorities was to establish peace in the Syrian Orthodox Church in India where he went in 1932, but he died there. He is buried in Umallur where many faithful come to pray by his tomb. He is feasted every year by many Indian faithful on 13th February. Many people receive help, healing and miracles from his tomb. He has been considered a saint since 1982.

4) Mar Ignatius Ephrem I Barsom

Mar Ignace Ephrem I Barsom (b.1887- d. June 1957) was from 1933 a great Patriarch who dedicated all his life to his Church, as well as a great and well-known scholar and a member of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago and of the Arab Academy at Damascus. He knew seven languages. He was born in Mosul and he entered the monastery of Zafaran in 1905. From 1913-16 he studied in Jerusalem and in



Paris. In 1918 he was consecrated as Metropolitan of Lebanon and Syria with his residence in Homs. He helped the Syrian Orthodox refugees coming from Turkey to Syria. He took part in the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919. In 1939 he founded the theological seminary in Zahlah, Lebanon. He wrote many books, of which we only quote his famous *History of the Syriac sciences and Literature, History of Tur Abdin, History of the Monastery of Zafaran*, all printed in Arabic.

Mar Meletius Barnaba, the present archbishop of Homs, remembers Patriarch Ephrem whom he served as secretary: "Patriarch Ephrem knew almost all the Syriac manuscripts existing, which he saw in many famous foreign libraries during his travels in Egypt, Europe and the United States to visit our Church's emigrants. He was as a father to his sons. As a Patriarch in Homs he used to sit every night with his four monk priests, speaking about Syrian Orthodox Church history and



fathers. Living with him was like being in a little monastery. His life was similar to that of the saints, very simple, but, at the same time, he was a great man. He knew everybody in the government, even the president; all visited him and often asked his advice. He used to say: "Don't run after money, it will fall at your feet". He followed the Fathers' lives. It is known

that through his prayers some people were healed. His tomb is on the left of the altar in the Virgin's church in Homs.

Biographies of Patriarch Ephrem were written in Arabic, such as the one by Paulos Behnam (Mosul, 1959), and another one by Metropolitan Yohanna Ibrahim (Aleppo, 1996).

5) Patriarch Jacob III

Patriarch Jacob III (1912-80) was born in Bartalla, Iraq, and he studied in Mar Mattai Monastery and in Homs where he became a monk in 1931. He was sent in 1933 to Malabar, India, by Patriarch Barsom. In 1934 he became a priest and the director of the seminary in Umallur, India, until 1946. Then he taught in the Mar Ephrem Seminary in Mosul. In 1950 he was consecrated as Metropolitan of Beirut and Damascus and in 1957 as Patriarch. He worked for the reconciliation of the Church in India and for the cooperation of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. He was very active in



organising the Church and erecting new buildings, and he visited his faithful in both Americas. He was a good preacher. He wrote more than thirty books about Church History, spirituality and liturgy: a *History of the Church* until the 6th century, a *History of the Syrian Church in India*, as well as a comparative study of Syriac and Arabic languages, and Biographies of Philoxenus of Mabbug, Jacob of Serugh, and Mar Ephrem. Metropolitan Gregorius of Aleppo remembers: "Patriarch Jacob was unique in his love for the Church, and he demonstrated that through his active works until his death. People were very attracted by his spiritual way of celebrating the liturgy. He was always encouraging the seminarians to become monks, saying that monastic life was the best way to get close to God. After he had consecrated myron in Mar Gabriel Monastery in 1964, the following day myron flowed from the glass container and people were healed by it".

6) Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas

Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, the present Patriarch, was born in Mosul in Iraq. He was the secretary of the late Patriarch Jacob III. He studied Oriental languages and pastoral theology in New York. In 1962-3 he was an observer at the Second Vatican Council. From 1963 he was the archbishop of Mosul, then of Baghdad and was elected as Patriarch in 1980. Since then he has acted as an organiser of the Church in all fields, including in the diaspora, and as a spiritual father who inspires priestly and monastic vocations. His biography, *Light and Offering (Nur Wa'Ata)* was written by Metropolitan Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo.

It is not possible to mention all that these figures have written in the fields of theology, history, spirituality, philosophy, poetry and literature. We can only say here that they followed the example of their great Syriac Fathers, and they inspired the spiritual life of many people.

Spirituality is life in Christ and it can be granted to any one: ordinary monks, nuns and lay people alike can be spiritual fathers or mothers. This is why I asked Malfono Isa, a married deacon living in Mar Gabriel Monastery in Tur Abdin, which other people, apart from Bishop Dolabani, influenced him in his spiritual life. Then he recalled an old monk of Mar Awgin monastery, abuna Lahdo abd'el Ahad who reflected the spirit of ancient monastic life. "He used to pray all night in his cell and tell us stories of the old monks his friends. During the Great Fast they took grasses from the mountain and ate them without cooking. That type of food kept them very healthy. During the summer, as the monastery was close to the desert, the monks used to fill their

skin gourd with water and walk to the road to offer it to the passers-by. Many people asked who they were. Then the monks spoke about Christianity and monastic life, and about the Gospel passage where it is written that if you give water to someone, you will receive your reward; because of that they gave water to any one in need. Sometimes people gave them donations for the monastery. He also spoke of very ascetic hermits who did not sleep, and who came to the monastery only to receive communion".

As a child Malfono Isa saw faithful old people, married or single, who were living only for God, in the villages of Tur Abdin, sometimes in the monasteries, always praying, always helping people for no reward, for example in the fields, or curing the sick, or making peace in families. They also helped Muslims. They were good Christian examples. Isa's uncle was a such a good faithful man: he never lied, he was never angry. He liked animals very much and he took care of those thrown out because people thought they were useless. But he took such good care of them, because they were creatures of God, that later people would admire them when they looked healthy again, and they would like to buy them because they looked well again after his good treatment! And people would joke and ask him: "Can I become your donkey? Can you also take care of me?". He never shouted at people, he was always cheerful, easy to deal with. He was full of mercy and everything he would touch became precious. As for Isa's father, he is now about 100 years old, but he spends most of the night praying. Isa's father and uncle are now living in Sweden.

Theodoret wrote his *History of the Monks* in order to bequeath to all the faithful and the coming generations the memory of great ascetics as models for their edification, and for leading a life of charity that would bring them close to Christ. He also included some stories of pious laypeople. Without pretending to imitate bishop Theodoret, when I collected the few stories above, my hope was that others would continue to write down as many similar spiritual testimonies as possible.

Conclusion

I hope that through these few pages the reader has been able to discover something of the very difficult history and life of the Syrian Orthodox Church until the present day, crossed with constant movements, persecution and martyrdom.

As a priest told me: "Our history is a history of crucifixion".

A young man in Aleppo said: "Our people were so tired when they fled from Urfa to Aleppo with nothing, but they managed to build our church here; they had only faith to encourage them".

One can wonder how it is possible to overcome all these difficulties, and how to remain a unshakeable witness to the Christian faith throughout the centuries?

A young lady from Qamishli told me: "In spite of our general economic and political difficulties, we always ask help from God; this is the reason why we remain strong in our faith and faithful to our Church until today, because help always comes from God, not from human beings. It is important to continue to live on our ancestors' ground".

Patriarch Ephrem Barsom was once asked, how he and his Church could survive through all the difficult of the past and present times. He answered that he believed that the saints of the Syrian Orthodox Church helped him a great deal because, for instance, he wrote good things about them and so the saints would not forget him and his Church.

An old man in Aleppo told me: "I believe that the more we are attached to our Apostolic Church, the more we shall continue to live as a Christian community: my Church, my Patriarchate and myself. No national territory. When we accepted christianity we left everything else, every form of power. Our country is in Heaven, in the Kingdom of God. Emigration is bad. We are few in number. If we become divided into different groups in other countries - scattered-what will happen? If we remain faithful to the Church we will continue to exist because the Church and the Patriarch represent us. To remain faithful we must be conscious of ourselves; love and help each other; encourage the youth to obey and serve the Church; and study the tradition. In this way we can keep our identity".

As Bishop Matta of Hasakah told me: "We live our Christian theology: there is always resurrection after suffering, sacrifice and crucifixion. And now we are living a time of resurrection through the revival of our Church".

Today different signs of revival can be noticed in the Syrian Orthodox Church such as the new seminary, the study of Syriac language, the studies of the students abroad, the translation of theological and religious books from Syriac to Arabic and other languages and their publication, monastic life, well-organised religious education and activities for young people. At the same time Syrian Orthodox know that they must continue to rediscover the roots and spirituality of their history and heritage, to revive them in the life and education of their people and to keep them alive throughout the generations. They must also have new projects such as to print more religious books and bulletins, to make tape recordings, and, above all, to organize contacts and maintain unity between the Mother Church and the diaspora.

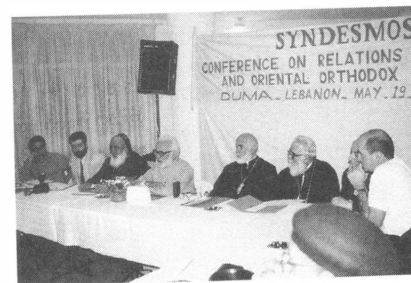
I often asked the following question: how can a balance between Tradition and modern life be kept? Farida Boulos of Aleppo answered: "If we read Saint Ephrem's prayers, we can understand that their deep theological meaning, the spiritual food and beauty they offer make these poems timeless and for all times. Once people understand their depth and are enriched from the Tradition, they see that there is no contradiction with so-called modern life. Saint Ephrem was not only a great theologian and poet, but he was a precursor, a modern man, even concerning the role of women in the Church! This is the man whom people have to discover; and people have to discover in the same way all the other spiritual treasures of our Syrian Orthodox Church. Tradition includes faith, the teachings of the Fathers, and the liturgy: all this has to be kept and nobody has the right to change it. As for 'traditions' people can adapt them according to their place".

Let us now recall Bar Hebraeus, the Maphrian in the 13th century who is regarded as one of the greatest Syrian Orthodox Fathers, because he wrote so many works in so many different fields and because of his universal competence. He possessed a wonderful knowledge of the history, traditions and spirit of the Christian and even of the Muslim religions. He also participated in mathematical and astronomical studies with Muslim scholars. His brother, Bar Sawma, records that he was as a brilliant beacon and a great pillar of fire for his Church and people. Until his last breath he did not only build new churches even in Tabriz and Maragheh, the new Mongol capitals (today in Iran), but he never ceased from reading and writing. When he died in 1286 in Maragheh, clergy of all denominations, including Greek Orthodox, were present at his funeral. They all mourned him, because everyone could see his diligence, goodness, gentleness, his warm heartedness and humility. As

E.A.W Budge writes, Bar Hebraeus' chief aim in his life and work was to stimulate the interest of the Syrian Orthodox in their history, language and literature, and to help them to maintain their position alive in Western Asia. He tried to make them realize the vital importance of some knowledge of the learning of both the Greeks and the Arabs, of translations, in order to adopt and develop learning in their own special way. And this was also the aim of the Patriarchs Barsom and of the Bishops Behnam and Dolabani, and of other famous Syrian Orthodox figures, in the 20th century.

One should not forget the unique role played by the Syrian Orthodox in the trans-cultural enrichment of the Near and Middle East by their translations from Greek to Arabic, often via Syriac, especially under the Umayyads and Abbasids.

The Syrian Orthodox Church has been a member of the WCC since 1960, and of the Middle East Council of Churches since 1974. There have been regular contacts with the Catholic Church (Common Christological and Pastoral Agreements in Rome in 1971 and 1984).



What about ecumenism today between the two ancient Patriarchates of Antioch? The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius Hazim, told me: "The Syriac tradition is an authentic Apostolic tradition in our area which must be maintained. There is a Byzantine tradition as well. Both are necessary for the spiritual heritage of the Middle East. We must accept this multiplicity as a richness of the Church. Each family will keep its own liturgical tradition".

As for Patriarch Zakka I, he advises that the national and cultural elements should not be idealized in order that the official dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox may continue. There should be no denial of any other Apostolic tradition or person. Unity does not mean to suppress oneself for the other, or vice and versa. The Church is an expression of the Incarnation of Our Lord. The Church is a Living People for whom

the Lord was crucified. In order to heal the wounds caused by the misunderstandings of the past, people should not live in the past. We have to live a new life in Christ every day: that is what the Churches are made for.

The Syrian Orthodox Church is an important witness to the one undivided early Church. Many Chalcedonian Orthodox of Antioch have forgotten that they used to pray in Syriac until at least as late as the 17th century. The strong historical, liturgical and spiritual links between them and the Syrian Orthodox should be studied.

In his 1995 Christmas and New Year's message Archbishop Timotheos Samuel Aktas in the *Voice of Tur Abdin* summarised the situation not only of Tur Abdin, but also of other Syrian Orthodox communities. He wrote: "It is a season of renewal in hope. That hope is generated by the miracle of God coming down into a stable, through a virgin girl, as a baby, to be with us. In this hope, love and resolution, we as a people face the dark and turbulent world, as well as our own shortcomings. We carry a treasure from our forefathers, a treasure deriving from historical experiences of faith and patience, fleshed out in places like the ancient Tur Abdin. It is a culture, a language, a scholarship, a life and an art. More importantly it is a historical memory of saints and devoted servants of Jesus enduring all privation and hostility in hope and love. It is our mission to unite a true renaissance of this faith, life, culture, literature and art with a true and lively relation to the integrating and modern world. We have a treasure to contribute to the mixing masses of humankind, and this will take tremendous effort—both to hold to the treasure, and to know how to give and take in the richness and confusion of the growing international relations among Christians and others. It is imperative that the leadership of our churches and monasteries give themselves to this renaissance, to call and work with the youth for active efforts to fulfil our responsibility to each other, our service to all Christians, and our mission to the whole world".

And, as Metropolitan Gregorius Yohanna of Aleppo stated: "The Church is not only a place to pray, but also to serve the people and to be with them, to find solutions for their problems. One of our priorities is to rebuild our community on a spiritual foundation".

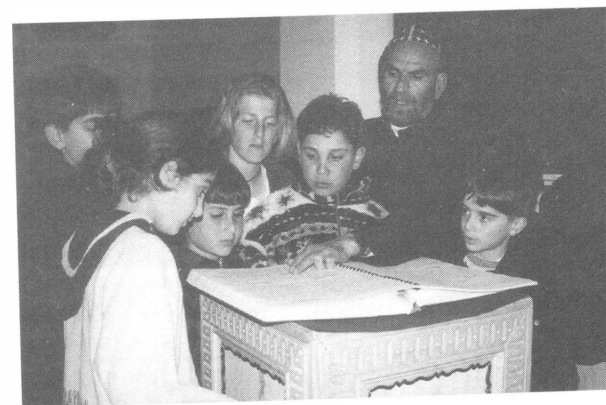
I shall end this book with two stories. An Eastern Orthodox family in Beirut was very impressed by the faith of an old Syrian Orthodox woman who was given a little job in their house. She was originally from Tur Abdin and had fled at the time of the genocide. Every week,

after receiving her humble wages, she would immediately walk to her church, and give half of them to the Church. So great was her love for God and her devotion to her Church.

It is because of such faithful Syrian Orthodox, true witnesses for Christ, sometimes even to death, that the community is still alive. An English teacher in Aleppo told me: "It was a blessing to be faithful, it is a miracle to be still alive".

Horatio Southgate arriving in Nisibis in 1841 wrote: "... and then came the old nun of Saint James looming up in the moonlight, and I thought of the faith which was once professed here, and of the prayers which had been offered, and how the faith might again rise from its ruins".

In a charismatic manner Patriarch Zakka said to me: "The Holy Spirit is our teacher and will guide us and our successors to the Truth. Because of the Holy Spirit I don't feel alone in organising our Church, neither doing my own will. If you feel that you are guided by the Holy Spirit, you should obey the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit knows the needs of the Church, the needs of the young people. I pray that God will help me to serve the people. And that is why I should follow the



example of Our Lord Jesus Christ and his disciples, to go out and preach and try to be a good example for others. We should speak with the young people in our age in their language, in the language of this century and of the coming century, not outside society. If the young people trust their teachers and feel they are helped, and if you cooperate with them, they themselves will give spiritual fruit within the life of the Church".

Thanks to its spiritual leaders and their sense of responsibility in handing on the tradition and teaching the faith, the Syrian Orthodox do their best to keep alive a most important treasure of Christendom.

Let us pray that God will inspire the people of the young generation to maintain their tradition and to bear fruit, in the Middle East or wherever they are settled around the world, in every way, including by studying. The short bibliography at the end of this book wishes only to be a small opening in that direction.

Everyone outside the Syrian Orthodox community should find ways to take some interest and show his or her solidarity in a practical way with the Syrian Orthodox Church and people, by visiting these communities, or by praying for them.



"Our Father" in Syriac / Serto

ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܐܒܝܢܐ

ܐܚܡܐ ܕܚܚܝܬܐ: ܢܚܝܬܐ ܚܚܝܬܐ. ܢܚܝܬܐ ܚܚܝܬܐ.
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Syriac Transliteration Table

CONSONANTS				VOWELS	
ܐ	a	ܬ	t	ܦ & ܦ	a
ܘ	b & v	ܝ	y	ܨ	o
ܟ	g	ܩ	k	ܩ	e
ܕ	d	ܠ	l	ܩ	i
ܡ	h	ܡ	m	ܨ	u
ܨ	w	ܨ	n	ܨ	
ܨ	z	ܨ	s		
ܨ	h	ܨ			

Our Father in Syriac in phonetic transcription

Aboon dbashmayo, Netqadash shmokh, Tite malkootokh, Nehwe sehyonokh aykano dbashmayo of baro, Hab lan' lahmo dsonkonan' yaumono, Owashboog lan' harwbayn' wahtohayn' aykano dof hnan' shbaqn' lbayobayn', Oulo talan' lnesyuno, Elo fason' men bisho, Metool' dilokhi malkooto hailo outeshbuhto lolam' olmin' amin.

Structure of Main Daily Offices

(based on *Shehimo*, published by St Ephrem Monastery, Holland, 1982)

For Syriac terms, see Glossary.

Prayers are said by the priest, sung in parts by two groups of singers who sing in alternation. According to Patriarch Ignatius Bar Wahib (d.1333), the four sections of the Night Office (Lilyo) count as four services, thus making 10 in all each day, corresponding to the ten senses (physical and spiritual). In the preface to the Indian edition of the *Shehimo* (Weekday Offices), printed in Pampakuda, the following interpretation can be given to the seven daily Offices: Ramsho/the tilling of the ground; Sutoro/the sowing; Lilyo/the weeding; Sapro/the harvesting; Third Hour/the carrying away of the wheat; Sixth Hour/the threshing; Ninth Hour/the almsgiving from the Firstfruits of the harvest.

Fixed introductory prayers for all Offices:

Trisagion

Lord, have compassion on us, Lord, have mercy and compassion on us;
Lord, accept our service and our prayers, and have compassion on us.

Glory to you, our God; glory to you, our Creator; glory to you, our eternal Hope.

Our Father...

Glory to the Father...

(1) RAMSHO/Vespers

Fixed introductory prayers

Ps 140 (141), 141 (142), 118 (119):105-112, 116 (117), sung with an 'enyono/qonuno intercalated between each verse
sedro, 'eqbo

qolo 1 (with stanzas for Theotokos, Saints, Repentance, Departed), 'etro,
qolo 2 (with stanzas as above)

[On Sundays and Feasts: +hulolo and Gospel]

quqlion, 'eqbo, sedro of repentance, qolo, bo'utho,
final fixed prayers

(2) LILYO/Night Office

Fixed introductory prayers
m'irono

Ps 133 (134), 118 (119):169-76, 116 (117), sung with an 'enyono/qonuno intercalated between each verse

First Qawmo (of Theotokos)

(Variable Psalms, with 'enyone)

'eqbo, sedro of Theotokos,

qolo (quqoyo) [on Sundays and Feasts, preceded by another qolo, and followed by two madroshe]

bo'utho (metre of Mor Ya'qub [Jacob of Serugh])

Second Qawmo (of Saints)

(Variable Psalms, with 'enyone)

sedro of saints, 'eqbo

qolo (quqoyo) [on Sundays and Feasts, preceded by another qolo and followed by two madroshe]

bo'utho (metre of Mor Ephrem)

Third Qawmo (of Repentance [Mon.Tue.Thur] or the Departed [Wed.Fri.Sat])

'eqbo, sedro, qolo,

bo'utho (metre of Mor Balai)

sedro,

Magnificat (mawrbo, with 'enyono)

Ps. 132 (133) with 'enyono

qolo

Pss 148-150 [Sund., Feasts: +116]

Teshmeshto of Patron Saint (had qnumo)

Ps 92: 13-16

sedro, qolo (quqoyo), bo'utho

(3) SAPRO/Matins

Introductory prayers

Pss 51, 63, sung with 'enyono intercalated between each verse
[Sun. and Feasts: + Odes, with 'enyono]

Magnificat (mawrbo with 'enyono)

Ps 113, sung with 'enyono

Pss 148-150 [Sun. and Feasts: Beatitudes, with 'enyono]

'eqbo, sedro

qolo I (with stanzas for Theotokos, Saints, Repentance, Departed)

'etro, qolo II

[Sun. and Feasts: + hulolo and Gospel]

quqlion, 'eqbo, sedro of repentance, qolo, bo'utho

Glossary of some liturgical terms

S.Brock said that many terms can mean several different things, and often several terms can be used to describe exactly the same thing.

anide: the departed.

beth gazo, 'treasury': repertory of hymns and melodies (qole) arranged according to 8 tones.

bo'utho, lit. 'request', pl. bo'awotho: hymn in couplets which can be in three different metres: 'of Jacob (of Serugh) = 12+12 syllables; 'of Ephrem' = 7+7 syllables; or 'of Balai' = 5+5 syllables. These are usually excerpted from much longer poems (mimre).

edono, lit. 'time'; pl. 'edone: (1) the 7 'edone are the 7 daily offices (alternative term: teshmeshto (pl. teshmshotho) 'service', or sho'e, 'hours'). (2) = qawmo, station in the Night Office/Lilyo.

eqbo, lit. 'heel': a single responsorial stanza.

etro: prayer accompanying incense.

ewangelyon: Gospel.

hulolo: short doxological verse preceding Gospel reading.

husoyo, lit. 'propitiation': prayers accompanying offering of incense (i.e. prooimion, sedro and 'etro; these were first put together by Patriarch Michael the Great (d.1199) in a volume entitled 'Book of Husoye').

hutomo, lit. 'sealing': final prayer.

koruko: 'enyono consisting of two stanzas.

koruzotho: diaconal proclamation, with refrain by people.

kushopho: intercessory prayer.

Lilyo: Night Office.

modo: Baptism.

madrosho: stanzaic poem, found in Lilyo for Sundays and Feasts.

ma'nitho, lit 'response': short responsorial hymn, associated with Patriarch Severus of Antioch (d.538).

marmitho: section of the Psalter.

mawrbo: (1) Magnificat. (2) 'enyono intercalated between verses of Magnificat.

mazmuro: Psalm.

mimro: poem in couplets; source of bo'awotho (see under bo'utho).

m'rono, lit. 'waking, arousing': initial prayer at Lilyo.

pethgomo: verse, versicle (usually biblical).

prooimion: doxological introduction to sedro.

qawmo, lit. 'station' (Greek 'stasis'): section with Lilyo.

qinto: tone (corresponding to Greek ikhos).

qolo, lit. 'voice' or 'tone': (1) stanzaic hymn; (2) melody.

qonuno: a kind of 'enyono; may be yawnoyo ('Greek'), i.e. translated from Greek (corresponding to stichiron when accompanying Psalms, to kanon when accompanying Odes); these follow no syllabic metre, such as is normal in Syriac verse.

qubolo: the first of the two qole associated with censng.

quqlion: (1) a group of 4 verses taken from Psalms with 'halleluiahs' sung between each of the half verses (2) Psalms sung with quqlion have Halleluiahs between every two pethgome.

quqoyo: a qolo in a special metre, associated with Simeon the Potter (Quqoyo).

Ramsho: Evening Office, Vespers.

Sapro/Safro: Morning Office, Matins.

sedro: prayer (often long and with theological content), normally accompanying offering of incense. Preceded by prooimion, and linked with 'etro (all three together are often described as a husoyo).

shuroyo: initial prayer.

sughitho: a type of madrosho with short stanzas, sometimes with alphabetic acrostic, and may also take the form of dialogues in alternating stanzas between biblical characters (e.g. Angel and Mary; the Two Thieves).

Sutoro: Compline.

takshefto: supplicatory hymn.

tekso: rite (service book).

teshbuhto, lit. 'praise': (1) Ode. (2) hymn of praise.

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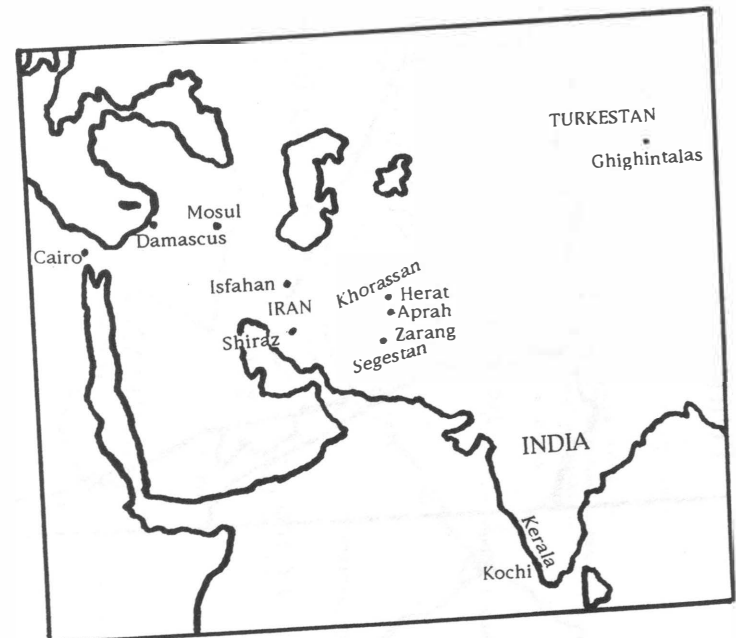
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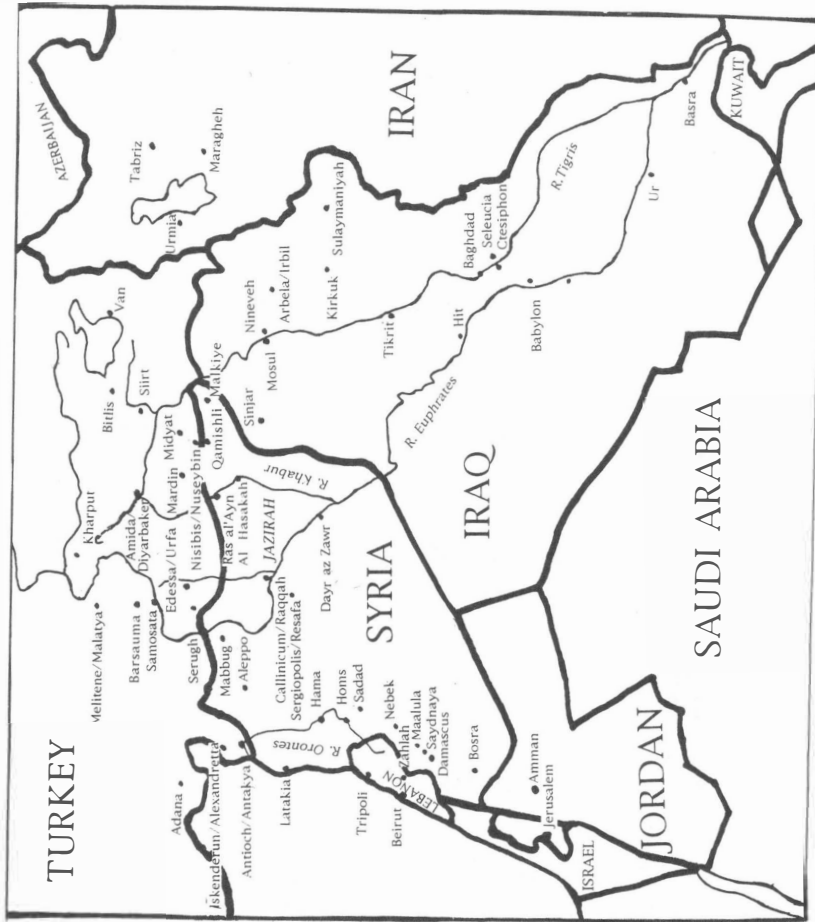
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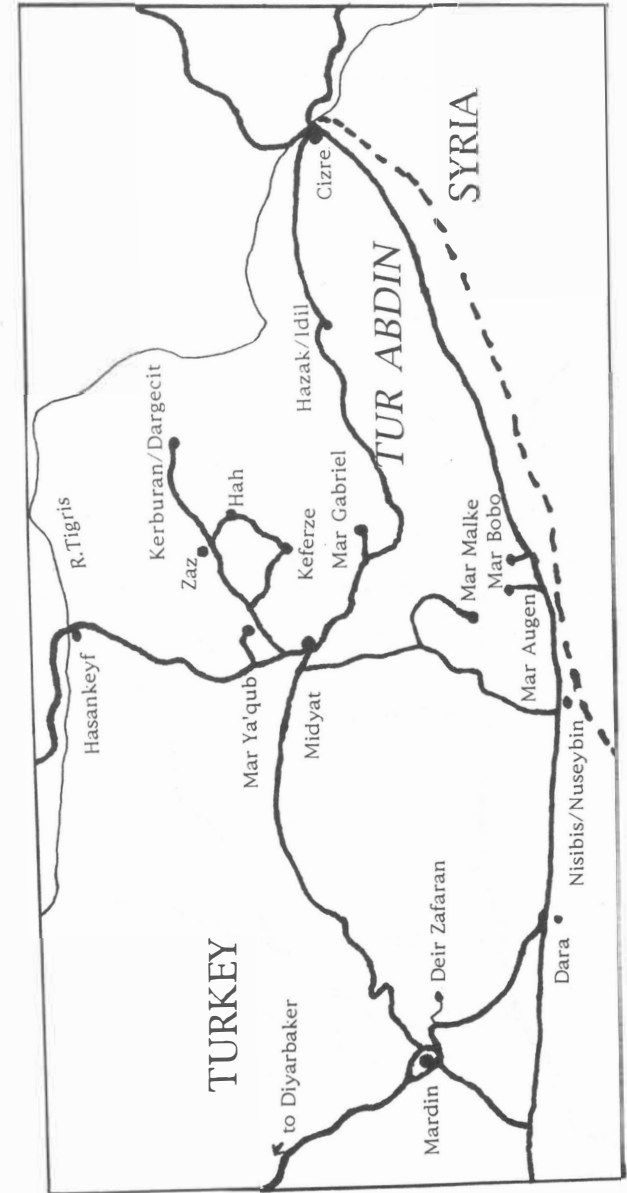
1) From the Middle East to India



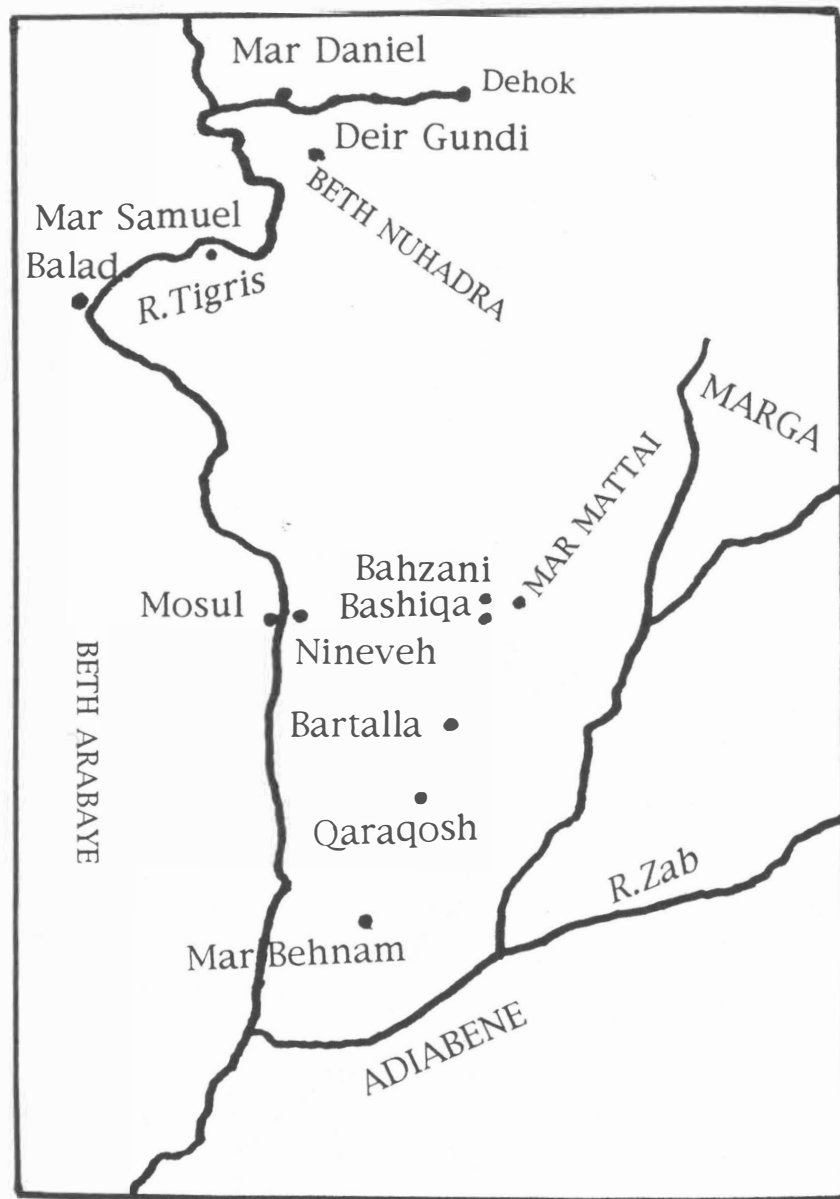
2) The Middle East



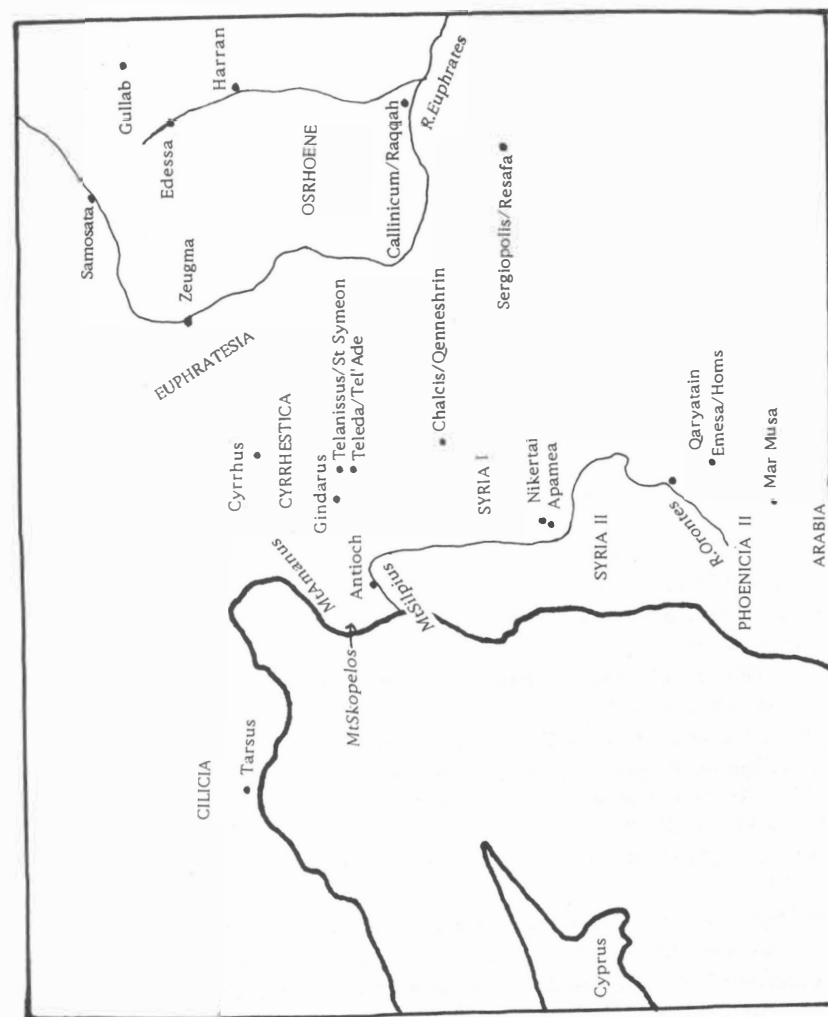
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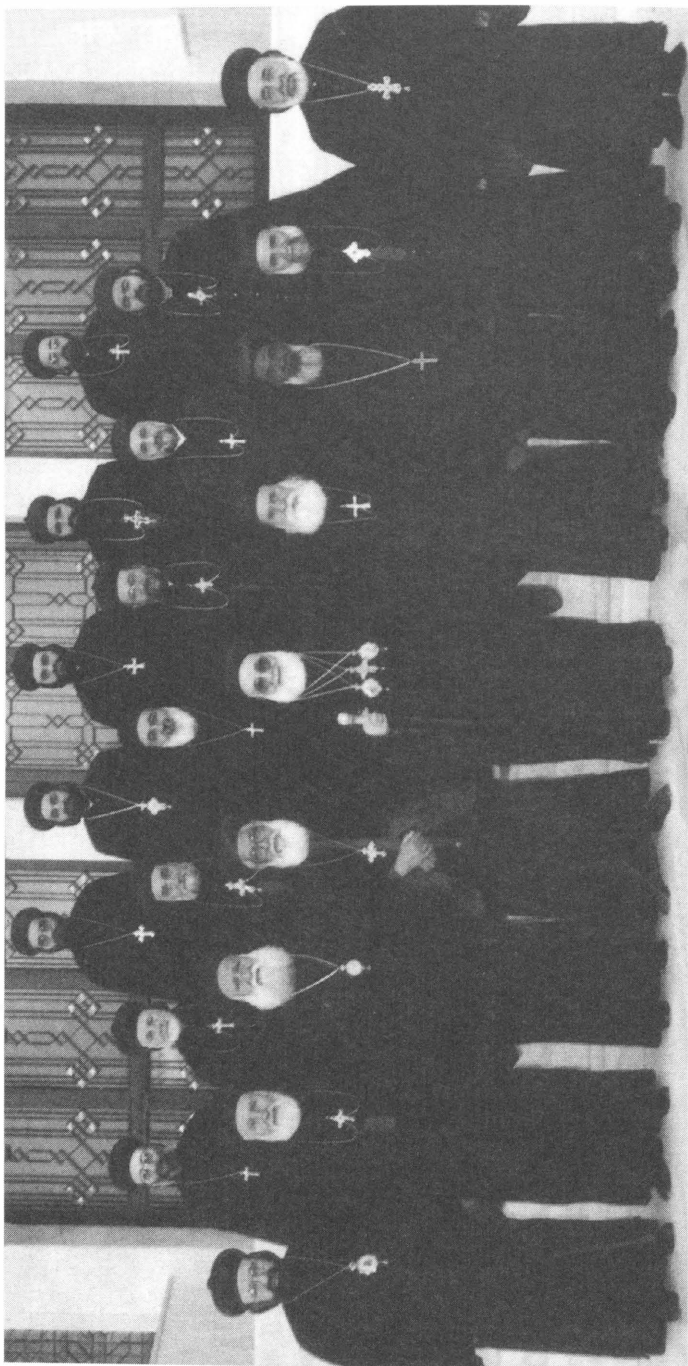
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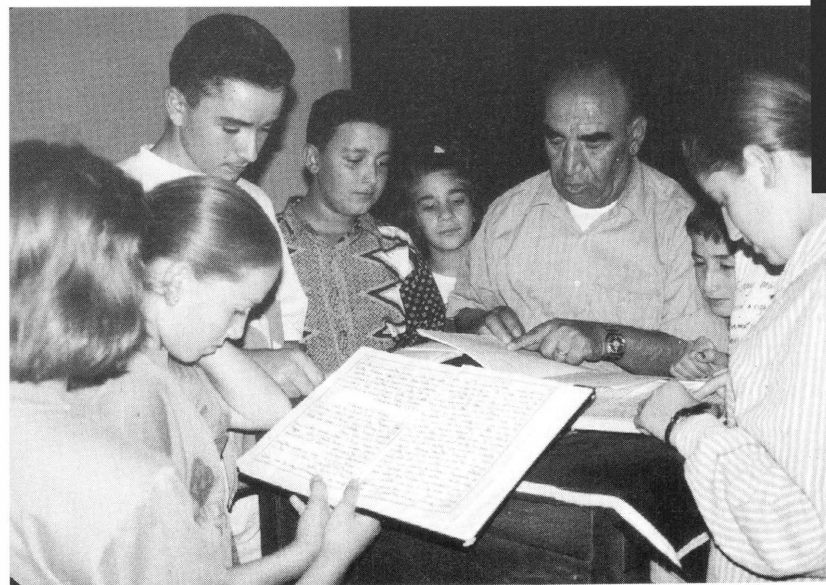
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The history of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch is an important testimony to Apostolic Christianity, not only around Antioch, but also in northern Mesopotamia, in Edessa, Nisibis and the surroundings. The ancestral language is Syriac, close to Aramaic spoken by Jesus Christ himself. On a modern map the cradle of the Syrian Orthodox is situated between the South East of Turkey, Northern Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. Nowadays the community is present in the Middle East, but Syrian Orthodox faithful are also found in great number in Kerala, (India), and around the world. Syrian Orthodox patrimony is rich not only in literature, but its spirituality is also to be discovered in its liturgical and monastic tradition. The Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East is part of the Oriental Orthodox family, together with the Copts, Armenians, Ethiopians, and the autocephalous Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India.

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